

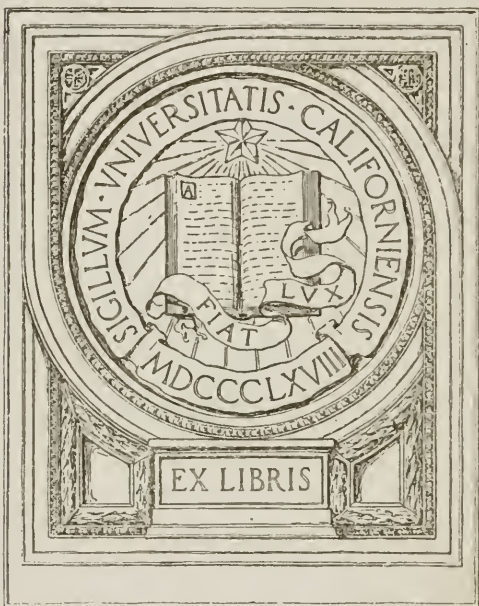


SALTED
WITH
FIRE

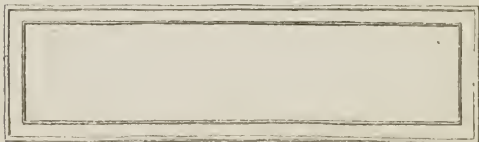


GEORGE
MACDONALD

IN MEMORIAM
Mary J. L. Mc Donald



EX LIBRIS



SALTED WITH FIRE

SALTED WITH FIRE

A Story of a Minister

BY

GEORGE MACDONALD



NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1897

Copyright, 1896-1897

BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

TO AND
IN MEMORIAM

IN MEMORIAM

Mary J. L. MacDonald

University Press

JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.

PR4967
53
1897
MAIN

Salted With Fire

CHAPTER I

“WHAUR are ye aff till this bonny mornin’, Maggie, my dow?” said the soutar, looking up from his work, and addressing his daughter as she stood in the doorway with her shoes in her hand.

“Jist ower to Stanecross, wi’ yer leave, father, to speir the mistress for a feow goupins o’ chaff: yer bed aneth ye’s grown unco hungry-like.”

“Hoot, the bed’s weel eneuch, lassie!”

“Na, it’s onything but weel eneuch. It’s my pairt to luik efter my ain father, and see there be nae knots either in his bed or his parritch.”

“Ye’re jist yer mither ower again, my lass! Weel, I winna miss ye that sair, for the minister ’ll be in this mornin’.”

“Hoo ken ye that, father?”

“We didna gree vera weel last nicht.”

“I canna bide the minister — argle-barglin’ body!”

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Toots, bairn! I dinna like to hear ye speyk sae scornfu’ like o’ the gude man that has the care o’ oor souls!”

“It wad be mair to the purpose ye had the care o’ his!”

“Sae I hae; hasna ilkabody the care o’ ilk ither’s?”

“Ay; but he preshumes upo’ ’t—and ye dinna; there’s the differ!”

“Weel, but ye see, lassie, the man has nae insicht—nane to speak o’, that is; and it’s pleased God to mak him a wee stoopid, and some thrawn (*twisted*). He has nae notion even o’ the wark I put intil thae wee bit sheenie o’ his—that I’m this moment labourin’ ower!”

“It’s sair wastit upon him ’at canna see the thought intil ’t!”

“Is God’s wark wastit upo’ you and me excep’ whan we see intil ’t and un’erstan’ ’t, Maggie?”

The girl was silent. Her father resumed.

“There’s three concernt i’ the matter o’ the wark I may be at: first, my ain duty to the wark—that’s me; syne him I’m working for—that’s the minister; and syne him ’at sets me to the wark, and him i’ the need o’ ’t—ye ken wha that is: whilk o’ the three wad ye hae me lea’ oot o’ the consideration?”

For another moment the girl continued silent; then she said, —

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Ye maun be i’ the richt, father. I believe’t, though I canna jist *see* ’t. A body canna like a’body, and the minister’s jist the ae man I canna bide.”

“Ay could ye, gi’en ye lo’ed the *ane* as he ocht to be lo’ed, and as ye maun learn to lo’e him.”

“Weel, I’m no come to that wi’ the minister yet!”

“It’s a trowth — but a sair pity, my dautie.”

“He provokes me the w’y that he speaks to you, father — him ’at’s no fit to tie the thong o’ your shee!”

“The Maister would lat him tie his, and say thank ye!”

“It aye seems to me he has sic a scrimpit way o’ believin’! It’s no like believin’ at a’! He winna trust him for naething that he hasna his ain word, or some ither body’s for! Ca’ ye that lippenin’ til him?”

It was now the father’s turn to be silent for a moment. Then he said, —

“Lea’ the judgin’ o’ him to his ain maister, lassie. I ha’e seen him whiles sair concernt for ither fowk.”

“’At they wouldna haud wi’ him, and war condemn’t in consequence — wasna that it?”

“I canna answer ye that, bairn.”

“Weel, I ken he doesna like you — no ae

SALTED WITH FIRE

wee bit. He's aye girdin' at ye to ither fowk."

"Maybe. The mair's the need I should lo'e him."

"But noo *can* ye, father?"

"There's naething, o' late, I ha'e to be sae gratefu' for to him as that I can. But I confess I had to try sair at first!"

"The mair I was to try, the mair I jist couldna."

"But ye could try; and He could help ye."

"I dinna ken; I only ken that sae ye say, and I maun believe ye. Nane the mair can I see hoo it's ever to be brought about."

"No more can I, though I ken it can be. But just think, my ain Maggie, hoo would onybody ken that ever ane o' 's was his disciple, gien we war aye argle-barglin' about the holiest things — at least what the minister coonts the holiest, though may be I ken better? It's whan twa o' 's strive that what's ca'd a schism begins, and I jist winna, please God — and it does please him. He never said, Ye maun a' think the same gait, but he did say, Ye maun a' lo'e ane anither, and no strive!"

"Ye dinna aye gang to his kirk, father!"

"Na, for I'm jist feared sometimes lest I should stop lo'ein' him. It matters little aboot gaein' to the kirk ilka Sunday, but it matters a

SALTED WITH FIRE

heap about aye lo'ein' ane anither; and whiles he says things about the mind o' God, sic that it 's a' I can dee to sit still."

"Weel, father, I dinna believe that I can lo'e him ony the day, sae, wi' yer leave, I 's be awa to Stanecross afore he comes."

"Gang yer w'ys, lassie, and the Lord gang wi' ye, as ance he did wi' them that gaed to Emmaus."

With her shoes in her hand, the girl was leaving the house when her father called after her, —

"Hoo 's folk to ken that I provide for my ain whan my bairn gangs unshod? Tak aff yer shune gin ye like when ye're oot o' the toon."

"Are ye sure there 's nae hypocrisy about sic a fause show, father?" asked Maggie, laughing. "I maun hide them better!"

As she spoke, she put them in the empty bag she carried for the chaff.

"There 's a hidin' o' what I hae — no a pretendin' to hae what I haena! I 's be hame in guid time for yer tay, father. I can gang a heap better without them," she added, as she threw the bag over her shoulder. "I 'll put them on whan I come to the heather," she concluded.

"Ay, ay; gang yer wa's, and lea' me to the

SALTED WITH FIRE

wark ye haena the grace to advertteeze by wearin' o' 't."

Maggie looked in at the window as she passed it on her way, and got a last sight of her father. The sun was shining into the little bare room, and her shadow fell upon him as she passed him; but his form lingered clear in the close chamber of her mind after she had left him far behind her. There it was not her shadow, but the shadow rather of a great peace that rested concentrated upon him as he bowed over his last, his mind fixed indeed upon his work, but far more occupied with the affairs of quite another region. Mind and soul were each so absorbed in its accustomed labour that never did either interfere with that of the other. His shoemaking lost nothing when he was deepest sunk in some one or other of the words of his Lord, which he sought eagerly to understand — nay, I imagine it gained thereby. In his leisure hours, not a great, he was yet an intense reader; but it was nothing in any book that now occupied him; it was the live good news, the man Jesus Christ himself. In thought, in love, in imagination, that man dwelt in him, was alive in him, and made him alive. This moment he was with him, had come to visit him — yet was never far from him — present ever with an individuality that never quenched but was always

SALTED WITH FIRE

developing his own. For the soutar absolutely believed in the Lord of Life, was always trying to do the things he said, and to keep his words abiding in him. Therefore was he what the parson called a mystic, and was the most practical man in the neighbourhood; therefore did he make the best shoes, because the Word of the Lord abode in him.

The door opened, and the minister came into the kitchen. The soutar always worked there that he might be near his daughter, whose presence never interrupted either his work or his thought, or even his prayers, which at times seemed involuntary as a vital automatic impulse.

“It’s a grand day,” said the minister. “It aye seems to me that just on such a day will the Lord come, nobody expecting him, and the folk all following their various callings, just as when the flood came and astonished them.”

The man was but reflecting, without knowing it, what the soutar had been saying the last time they had encountered; neither did he think, at the moment, that the Lord himself had said it first.

“And I was thinkin’, this verra minute,” returned the soutar, “sic a bonny day as it was for the Lord to gang about amang his ain fowk. I was thinkin’ maybe he was come upon Maggie, and was walkin’ wi’ her up the hill to Stanecross,

SALTED WITH FIRE

— nearer till her, maybe, nor she could hear or see or think.”

“Ye’re a deal taen up wi’ vain imaignin’s, MacLear,” returned the minister, tartly. “What scriptur hae ye for sic a wanderin’ invention, o’ no practical value?”

“Deed, sir, what scriptur hae I for takin’ my brakfast this or ony mornin’? Yet I never luik for a judgment to fa’ upon me for that! I’m thinkin’ we do mair things in faith than we ken — but no eneuch! no eneuch! I was thankfu’ for’t though, I min’ that, and maybe that’ll stan’ for faith. But gien I gang on this gait, we’ll be beginnin’ as we left aff last nicht, and maybe fa’ to strife! And we hae to lo’e ane anither, not accordin’ to what the ane thinks, or what the ither thinks, but accordin’ as each kens the Maister lo’es the ither, for he lo’es the twa o’ us thegither.”

“But hoo ken ye that he’s pleased wi’ ye?”

“I said naething about that: I said he lo’es you and me!”

“For that, he maun be pleast wi’ ye!”

“I dinna think nane about that; I jist tak’ my life i’ my han’, and awa’ wi’ ’t till him; and he’s never turned his face frae me yet. Eh, sir! think what it would be gien he did!”

“But we maunna think o’ him ither than he would hae us think.”

SALTED WITH FIRE

“That’s hoo I’m aye hingin’ aroun’ his door, and aye luikin’ about for him.”

“Weel, I kenna what to mak’ o’ ye! I maun jist lea’ ye to him!”

“Ye couldna du a kinder thing! I desire naething better frae man or minister than be left to him.”

“Weel, weel, see till yersel’.”

“I’ll see to him, and try to lo’e my neighbour — that’s you, Mr. Pethrie. I’ll hae yer shune ready by Setterday, sir. I trust they’ll be worthy o’ the feet that God made, and that hae to be shod by me. I trust and believe they’ll nowise distress ye, or interfere wi’ yer preachin’. I’ll fess them hame mysel’, gien the Lord wull, and that without fail!”

“Na, na; dinna dee that; let Maggie come wi’ them. Ye would only be puttin’ me oot o’ humour for the Lord’s wark wi’ yer havers!”

“Weel, I’ll sen’ Maggie — only ye would obleege me by no seein’ her, for ye micht put *her* oot o’ humour, sir, and she michtna gie yer sermon fair play the morn!”

The minister closed the door with some sharpness.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER II

IN the meantime, Maggie was walking shoeless and bonnetless up the hill to the farm she sought. It was a hot morning in June, tempered by a wind from the northwest. The land was green with the slow-rising tide of the young corn, among which the cool wind made little waves, showing the brown earth between them on the somewhat arid face of the hill. A few fleecy clouds shared the high blue realm with the keen sun. As she rose to the top of the road, the gable of the house came suddenly into her sight, and near it a sleepy old grey horse, treading his ceaseless round at the end of a long lever, too listless to feel the weariness of a labour that to him must have seemed unprogressive, and to anything young heart-breaking. Nor did it seem to give him any consolation to listen to the commotion he was causing on the other side of the wall, where a threshing-machine of an antiquated sort was in full response with multiform motion to the monotony of his round-and-round. Near by a peacock, as conscious of his glorious plumage as indifferent to the ugliness of his feet, kept

SALTED WITH FIRE

time with his undulating neck to the motion of those same feet, as he strode with stagey gait across the cornyard, now and then stooping to pick up spitefully a stray grain, and occasionally erecting his superb neck to give utterance to a hideous cry of satisfaction at his own beauty, as unlike it as ever discord to harmony. His glory, his legs, and his voice perplexed Maggie with an unanalysed sense of contradiction and unfitness.

Radiant with age and light, the old horse stood still just as the sun touched the meridian; the hour of repose and food was come, and he knew it; at the same moment the girl, passing one of the green-painted doors of the farmhouse, stopped at the other, the kitchen one. It stood open, and in answer to her modest knock, a ruddy maid stood before her, with question in her eyes and a smile on her lips at sight of the shoemaker's Maggie, whom she knew well. Maggie asked if she might see the mistress.

"Here's the soutar's Maggie wantin' ye, mem!" called the maid, and Mistress Blatherwick, who was close at hand, came, to whom Maggie humbly but confidently making her request, had it as kindly granted, and at once proceeded to the barn to fill the pock she had brought, with the light plummy covering of the husk of the oats, the mistress of Stanecross help-

SALTED WITH FIRE

ing her the while, and talking away to her as she did so, for both the souter and his daughter were favourites with her and her husband, and she had not seen either of them for some time.

“Ye used to ken oor Jeames i’ the auld lang syne, Maggie!” she went on, for the two had played together as children at the same school, although growth and difference of station had gradually put an end to their intimacy, and it now became the mother to refer to him with circumspection, seeing that, in her eyes at least, James was far on the way to become a great man, being now a divinity student; for in the Scotch church, although it sets small store by the claim to apostolic descent, every minister, until he has either shown himself eccentric, or incapable of interesting a congregation, is regarded with quite as much respect as in England is accorded to the claimant of a phantom-priesthood; and therefore, prospectively, was to his mother a man of no little note. And Maggie remembered how, when a boy, he had liked to talk with her father, who listened to him with a curious look on his rugged face, while he set forth the commonplaces of a lifeless theology with an occasional freshness of logical presentation that at least interested himself. But she remembered also that she had never heard the souter, on his side, make the slightest attempt to

SALTED WITH FIRE

lay open to the boy his stores of what one or two in the place, but one or two only, counted wisdom and knowledge.

“He’s a gey clever laddie,” he had said once to Maggie, “and gien he gets his een open i’ the coorse o’ the life he’s begun to tak a haud o’, he’ll doobtless see something; but he disna ken yet that there’s onything rael to be scen ootside or inside o’ him!” When he heard that he was going to study divinity, he shook his head, and was silent.

“I’m jist hame frae payin’ him a short veesit,” Mrs. Blatherwick went on. “I cam hame but twa nights ago. He’s lodged wi’ a decent widow in Arthur Street, in a flat up a lang stane stair that gangs roun and roun till ye come there, and syne gangs past the door and up again. She luiks efter his claes, and sees to the washin’ o’ them, and does her best to haud him tidy; but Jeamie was aye that partic’lar about his appearance! And that’s a guid thing, specially in a minister, wha has to set an example! I was sair pleased wi’ the auld body.”

There was one in the Edinburgh lodging, however, who did not appear, so long as Mrs. Blatherwick was there, at least, oftener than she must, and of whom the mother had made no mention to her husband upon her return, any more than she did now to Maggie MacLear; indeed, she

SALTED WITH FIRE

had taken so little notice of her that she could hardly be said to have seen her at all. This was a girl of about sixteen, who did far more for the comfort of her aunt's two lodgers than she who reaped all the advantage. If Mrs. Blatherwick had let her eyes rest upon her but for a moment, she would probably have looked again, and perhaps discovered that she was both a good-looking and graceful little creature, with blue eyes and hair as nearly black as that kind of hair, both fine and plentiful, ever is. She might then have discovered as well a certain look of earnestness and service that might have been called devotion, and would at first have attracted her for its own sake, and then repelled her for James's; she would assuredly have read in it what she would have counted danger. But seeing her poorly dressed, and looking untidy, which she could not for the time help being, the mother took her for an ordinary servant of all work, and gave her no attention; neither once for a moment doubted that her son saw her just as she did. For him, who was her only son, her heart was full of ambition, and she brooded on the honour he was destined to bring her and his father. The latter, however, caring much less for his good looks, had neither the same satisfaction in him nor an equal expectation from him. Neither of his parents, indeed, had as yet reaped

SALTED WITH FIRE

much pleasure from his existence, however much they might hope in the time to come. There were two things against such satisfaction, indeed — that James had never been open-hearted toward them, never communicative as to his feelings, or even his doings; and, what was worse, that he had long made them feel in him a certain unexpressed claim to superiority over them. Nor would it have lessened their uneasiness at this to have noted that the existence of such an implicit claim was more or less evident in relation to everyone with whom he came in contact, manifested mainly by a stiff, incommunicative reluctance, taking the form now of an affected absorption in his books, now of contempt for any sort of manual labour, to the saddling of the pony he was about to ride, and now and always by an affectation of proper English, which, while quite successful as to grammar and accentuation, did not escape the ludicrous in a certain stiltedness of tone and inflection, from which intrusion of the would-be gentleman, his father, a simple old-fashioned man, shrank with more of dislike than he was willing to be conscious of.

Quite content that, having a better education than himself, his son should both be and show himself superior, he could not help feeling that these his ways of asserting himself were but

SALTED WITH FIRE

signs of foolishness, and especially as conjoined with his wish to be a minister, in regard to which Peter but feebly sympathised with the general ambition of Scots parents. Full of simple paternal affection, whose utterance was quenched by the behaviour of his son, he was continuously aware of something that took the shape of an impassable gulf between him and his father and mother. Profoundly religious, and readily appreciative of what was new in the perception of truth, although by no means eager after novelty, he was, above all, of a great and simple righteousness — full, that is, of a loving sense of fair-play — a very different thing, indeed, from what most of those who count themselves religious mean when they talk of the righteousness of God! Little, however, was James yet able to see of this or other great qualities in his father. I would not have my reader think that he was consciously disrespectful to either of his parents, or even knew that his behaviour was unloving. He honoured their character, but shrank from the simplicity of their manners; he thought of them with no lively affection, though with not a little kindly feeling and much confidence, at the same time regarding himself with still greater confidence. He had never been an idler, or disobedient, and had made such efforts after theological righteousness as had served to bol-

SALTED WITH FIRE

ster rather than buttress his conviction that he was a righteous youth, or at least to nourish his ignorance of the fact that he was far from being the person of moral strength and value that he imagined himself. The person he saw in the mirror of his self-consciousness was a very fine and altogether trustworthy personage; the reality so twisted in its reflection was but a decent lad, as lads go, with high but untrue notions of personal honour, and an altogether unwarranted conviction that such as he admiringly imagined himself, such he actually was; he had never discovered his true and unworthy self! There were many things in his life and ways upon which had he but fixed eyes of question he would at once have perceived that they were both judged and condemned. So far, nevertheless, his father and mother might have good hope of his future.

It is folly to suppose that such as follow most the fashions of this world are more enslaved by them than multitudes who follow them only afar off. These reverence the judgments of society in things of far greater importance than the colour or cut of a gown; often without knowing it, they judge life, and truth itself, by the falsest of all measures, namely, the judgment of others falser than themselves; they do not ask what is true or right, but what folk think and say

SALTED WITH FIRE

about this or that. James, for instance, altogether missed being a gentleman, by his habit of asking himself how, in such or such circumstances, a gentleman would behave. As the man of honour he would fain know himself, he would never tell a lie or break a promise; but he had not come to perceive that there are other things as binding as the promise, which alone he regarded as obligatory. He did not mind raising expectations which he had not the least intention of fulfilling.

Being a Scotch lad, it is not to be wondered at that he should turn to Theology as a means of livelihood; neither is it surprising that he should have done so without any conscious love to God, seeing it is not in Scotland alone that men take refuge in the Church, and turn the highest profession into the meanest, laziest, poorest, and most unworthy, by following it without any genuine call to the same. In any profession, the man must be a poor common creature who follows it without some real interest in it; but he who, without a spark of enthusiasm, adopts the Church, is either a "blind mouth," as Milton calls him, — scornfullest of epithets, — or an "old wife" ambitious of telling her fables well; and James's ambition was of an equally contemptible sort, — that, namely, of distinguishing himself in the pulpit. This, if he

SALTED WITH FIRE

had the natural gift of eloquence, he might well do by its misuse to his own glory ; or if he had it not, he might acquire a spurious facility resembling it, and so be every way a wind-bag.

Mr. Petrie, whom it cost the soutar so much care and effort to love, and who, although intellectually small, was yet a good man, and by no means a coward where he judged people's souls in danger, thought to save the world by preaching a God eminently respectable to those who could believe in such a God, but to those who could not, very far from lovely because far from righteous ; for his life, nevertheless, he showed himself in many ways a believer in Him who revealed a very different God indeed — which did not, however, prevent him from looking upon the soutar, who believed only in the God he saw in Jesus Christ, as one in a state of rebellion against God.

Young Blatherwick on his part had already begun to turn his back upon several of the special tenets of Calvinism, without, however, being either a better or a worse man because of this change in his opinions. He had cast aside, for instance, the doctrine of an everlasting hell for the unbeliever, but in doing so became aware that he was thus leaving fallow a great field for the cultivation of eloquence, and not having yet discovered any other equally productive of the

SALTED WITH FIRE

precious crop, without which so little was to be gained for the end he desired, — namely, the praise of men. He kept on in the meantime sowing and reaping the same field. Mr. Petrie, on the other hand, held to the doctrine as absolutely fundamental; while the souter, who had discarded it from almost his childhood, positively refused to enter into any argument on the matter with the disputatious little man, who was unable to perceive any force in his argument that, to tell a man he *must* one day give in and repent, would have greater potency with him than any assurance that the hour would come when repentance itself would be unavailing.

As yet, therefore, James was reading Scotch metaphysics, and reconciling himself to the concealment of his freer opinions, for upon their concealment depended the success of his probation, and his license. The close of his studies in divinity was now at hand.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER III

UPON a certain stormy day in the great northern city, preparing for what he regarded as his career, James sat in the same large shabbily furnished room where his mother had once visited him, half-way up the hideously long spiral stair of an ancient house, whose entrance was in a narrow close. The great clock of a church in the neighbouring street had just begun to strike five of a wintry afternoon, dark with snow, falling and yet to fall — how often in after years was he not to hear the ghostly call of that clock, and see that falling snow! — when a gentle tap came to his door, and the girl I have already mentioned came in with a tray, and the materials for his most welcomed meal of coffee and bread and butter. She set it down in a silence which was plainly that of deepest respect, gave him one glance of devotion, and was turning to leave the room, when he looked up from the paper he was writing, and said,—

“Don’t be in such a hurry, Isy. Haven’t you time to pour out my coffee for me?”

SALTED WITH FIRE

Isy was still a small, dark, neat little thing, with finely formed features, and a look of child-like simplicity, not altogether removed from childishness. She answered him first with her very blue eyes full of love and trust.

“Plenty o’ time, sir. What other have I to do than see that you ’re at your ease?”

He shoved aside his work, and looking up with some concentration in his regard, pushed his chair back a little from the table, and rejoined, —

“What ’s the matter with you this last day or two, Isy? You ’re not altogether like yourself!”

She hesitated a moment, then answered, —

“It can be naething, I suppose, but just that I ’m growing older and beginning to think about things.”

She stood near him. He put his arm round her little waist, and would have drawn her down upon his knees, but she resisted.

“I don’t see what difference that can make all at once, Isy! We ’ve known each other so long there can be no misunderstanding of any sort between us. You have always behaved like the good and modest girl you are ; and I ’m sure you have been most attentive to me all the time I have been in your aunt’s house.”

He spoke in the superior tone of approval.

“It was my bare duty, and ye hae aye been

SALTED WITH FIRE

kinder to me than I could hae had ony richt to expect'. But it's nearhan' ower noo!" she concluded with a sigh that indicated tears somewhere, and yielding to the increased pressure of his arm.

"What makes you say that?" he returned, giving her a warm kiss, plainly neither unwelcome nor the first.

"Dinna ye think it wad be better to drop that kin' o' thing noo, sir?" she said, and would have risen, but he held her fast.

"Why now, more than any time, for I don't know how long? Where is there any difference? What puts the notion in your pretty little head?" he asked.

"It maun come some day, and the langer the harder it'll be!"

"But tell me, what sets you thinking about it all at once?"

She burst into tears. He tried to soothe and comfort her, but in struggling not to cry she only sobbed the worse. At last, however, she succeeded in faltering out an explanation.

"Auntie's been tellin' me that I maun luik to my heart, no so tyne't to ye a' thegither! But it's awa already," she went on, with a fresh outburst; "and it's no manner o' use cryin' till't to come back to me! I micht as weel cry upo' the win' as it blows by me. I canna understan'

SALTED WITH FIRE

't; I ken weel ye'll soon be a great man, and a' the toon crushin' to hear ye; and I ken just as weel that I'll hae to sit still in my seat and luik up to ye whaur ye stan', — no daurin' to say a word, no daurin' even to think a thought lest somebody sittin' aside me should hear 't ohn me said a word. For what would it be but clean impidence to think 'at ance I was sittin' whaur I'm sitting the noo — and that i' the vera kirk — I would be nearhan' deein' for shame!"

"Did n't you ever think, Isy, that maybe I might marry ye some day?" said James jokingly, confident in the gulf between them.

"Na, no ance. I kenned better nor that! I never even wusst it. For that would be nae freen's wuss; ye would never get on gien ye did. I'm nane fit for a minister's wife — nor worthy o' it. I nicht do no that ill, and pass middlin' weel in a sma' clachan wi' a wee bit kirkie — but amang gran' fowk, in a muckle toon — for that's whaur ye're sure to be — eh me, me! A' the last week or twa I haena been able to help seein' ye driftin' awa frae me, oot and oot to the great sea, whaur never a thought o' Isy would come nigh ye again; and what for should there? Ye cam' na into the warld to think about me or the likes o' me, but to be a great preacher, and lea' me ahin ye, like a sheaf o' corn ye had jist cuttit and left unbun'!"

SALTED WITH FIRE

Here came another burst of bitter weeping, followed by words whose very articulation was a succession of sobs.

“ Eh me, me ! I doobt I hae clean disgraced mysel' ! ”

As to young Blatherwick, I venture to assert that nothing vulgar or low, still less of evil intent, was passing through his mind during this confession, and yet what but evil was his unpitying, selfish exultation in the fact that this simple-hearted and very pretty girl loved him unsought, and had told him so unasked ? A true-hearted man would at once have perceived and shrunk from what he was bringing upon her, but James's vanity made him think it only very natural, and more than excusable in her ; and while his ambition made him imagine himself so much her superior as to admit no least thought of marrying her, it did not prevent him from yielding to the delight her confession caused him, or from persuading her that there was no harm in loving one to whom she must always be dear, whatever his future might bring with it. Isy left the room not a little consoled, and with a new hope in possession of her innocent imagination ; James remained to exult over his conquest, and indulge a more definite pleasure than hitherto in the person and devotion of the girl. As to any consciousness of

SALTED WITH FIRE

danger to either of them, it was no more than the uneasy stir on the shore of a storm far out at sea; had the least thought of wrong to her invaded his mind, he would have turned from it with abhorrence; yet was he endangering all her peace of mind without giving it one reasonable thought. He was acting with selfishness too ingrained to manifest its own unlovely shape; while yet in his mind lay all the time a half-conscious care to avoid making a promise.

As to her fitness for a minister's wife, he had never asked himself a question concerning it; but she might, in truth, very soon have grown far fitter for the position than he was now for that of a minister. In character she was much beyond him, and in breeding and consciousness far more of a lady than he of a gentleman, — fine gentleman as he would fain know himself. Her manners were immeasurably better than his, because they were simple and aimed at nothing. Instinctively she avoided whatever, had she done it, she would have recognised as uncomely. She did not know that simplicity was the purest breeding, yet from mere truth of nature practised it unknowing. If her words were older-fashioned, therefore more provincial than his, at least her tone was less so, and her utterance prettier than if, like him, she had

SALTED WITH FIRE

aped an Anglicised mode of speech. James would, I am sure, have admired her more if she had been dressed on Sundays in something more showy than a simple cotton gown; but her aunt was poor, and she poorer, for she had no fixed wages even; and I fear that her poverty had its influence in the freedoms he allowed himself with her.

Her aunt was a weak as well as unsuspecting woman, who had known better days, and pitied herself because they were past and gone. She gave herself no anxiety upon her niece's prudence, but was so well assured of it that even her goodness seemed to fight against her safety. It would have required a man, not merely of greater goodness than James, but of greater insight into the realities of life as well, to perceive the worth and superiority of the girl who waited upon him with a devotion far more angelic than servile; for whatever might have seemed to savour of the latter had love, hopeless of personal advantage, at the root of it.

Thus things went on for a while, with a continuous strengthening of the pleasant yet not altogether easy bonds in which Isobel walked, and a constant increase in the power of the attraction that drew the student to the self-yielding girl, until the appearance of another lodger in the house was the means of opening Blather-

SALTED WITH FIRE

wick's eyes to the state of his own feelings, giving occasion to the birth and recognition of a not unnatural jealousy; and this "gave him pause." On Isy's side there was not the least occasion for this jealousy, and he knew it; but not the less he saw that, if he did not mean to go further, here he must stop, — the immediate result of which was that he began to change a little in his behaviour toward her, when at any time she came into his room in ministration to his wants.

Of this change the poor girl was at once aware, but attributed it to a temporary absorption in his studies. Soon, however, she could not doubt that not merely was his voice or his countenance changed towards her, but that his heart also had grown cold to her, and that he was no longer "friends with her." For there was another and viler element than mere jealousy concerned in his alteration; the consciousness of the jealousy had opened his eyes to another, to him a more real danger into which he was rapidly drifting, — that of irrecoverably blasting the very dawn of his prospects by an imprudent marriage. "To be saddled with a wife," as he vulgarly expressed it to himself, before a church was attainable to him, — before even he had had the poorest opportunity of distinguishing himself in that wherein he hoped to excel, — was a

SALTED WITH FIRE

thing not for a moment to be contemplated; and now, when Isobel asked him in sorrowful mood some indifferent question, the uneasy knowledge that he was about to increase her sadness made him answer her roughly, — a form not unnatural to incipient compunction. White as a ghost she stood silently staring at him a moment, then sank on the floor senseless.

Seized with an overmastering repentance that brought back with a rush all his tenderness, James sprang to her, lifted her in his arms, laid her on the sofa, and lavished caresses upon her, until she recovered sufficiently to know that she lay in the false paradise of his arms, while he knelt over her in a passion of regret, the first passion he had ever felt or manifested toward her, pouring into her ear words of incoherent dismay, which, taking shape as she revived, soon became promises and vows. Thereupon, worse consequence, the knowledge that he had committed himself, and the conviction that he was bound to one course in regard to her, wherein he seemed to himself incapable of falsehood, freed him from the self-restraint then most imperative, and his trust in his own honour became the last loop of the snare about to entangle his and her very life. At the moment when a genuine love would have hastened to surround her with bulwarks of safety, he ceased to be his

SALTED WITH FIRE

sister's keeper. Cain ceased to be his brother's when he slew him.

But the vengeance on his unpremeditated treachery—for treachery, although unpremeditated, it certainly was none the less—came close upon its heels. The moment Isy left the room weeping and pallid, conscious that a miserable shame but waited the entrance of importunate reflection, he threw himself down, writhing as in the claws of a hundred demons. The next day but one he was to preach his first sermon before his class, in the presence of his professor of divinity! His immediate impulse was to rush from the house, and home to his mother on foot. Perhaps it would have been well for him had he done so indeed, confessed all, and turned his back on the church and his paltry ambition together. But he had never been open with his mother, and he feared his father, not knowing the tender righteousness of that father's heart, or the springs of love which would at once open to meet the sorrowful tale of his wretched son. Instead of fleeing at once to that city of refuge, he fell to pacing the room in hopeless bewilderment; nor was it long before he was searching every corner of his reviving consciousness,—not indeed as yet for any justification, but for what palliation of his "fault" might there be found. It was the first necessity of this self-lover to

SALTED WITH FIRE

think well, or at least enduringly, of himself; and soon a multitude of sneaking arguments, imps of Satan, began to come at the cry of his agony of self-dissatisfaction.

But in that agony was no detestation of himself, because of his humiliation of the trusting Isobel; he did not yet loathe his abuse of her confidence, his foul envelopment of her in the fire-damp of his miserable weakness, — the hour of a true and good repentance was not yet come; shame only in the failure of his own fancied strength as yet possessed him. If it should ever come to be known, what contempt would clothe him instead of the garments of praise he had dreamed of all these years! The pulpit, the goal of his ambition, the field of his imagined triumphs, — the very thought of it made him sick. Still, there at least lay yet a chance of recovery; for many were the chances that no one might hear a word of what had happened. Sure enough, Isy would never tell anything, — least of all, her aunt! He had promised to marry poor Isy, and that, of course, he would, neither would it be any great hardship; only as an immediate thing, it was not to be thought of. There could be at the moment no necessity for such an extreme measure. He would wait and see. He would be guided by events. As to the sin of the thing, — how

SALTED WITH FIRE

many had fallen like him, and no one the wiser! Never would he so offend again; and in the meantime would let it go, and try to forget it,—in the hope that providence now, and at length time, would bury it from all men's sight. He would go on the same as if the untoward thing had not so cruelly happened, had cast no such cloud over the fair future that lay before him. Nor were his selfish regrets unmingled with annoyance that Isy should have yielded so easily; why had she not aided him to resist the weakness that had wrought his undoing? She was much to blame; and for her unworthiness was he to be left to suffer? Within half an hour he had returned to the sermon he had in hand, revising it for the twentieth time, to have it perfect before finally committing it to memory; for the orator would have it seem the thing it was not,—an outcome of extemporaneous feeling,—so the lie of his life be crowned with success. During what remained of the two days following he spared no labour, and at the last delivered it with considerable unction, and felt he had achieved his end. Neither of those days did Isy make her appearance in his room; her aunt excused her apparent neglect with the information that she was in bed with a bad headache, and herself supplied her place.

SALTED WITH FIRE

The next day she was about her work as usual, but never once looked up. He imagined reproach in her silence, and did not venture to address her. But, indeed, he had no wish to speak to her, for what was there to be said? A cloud was between them; a great gulf seemed to divide them. He wondered at himself, no longer conscious of her attraction, or of his former delight in her proximity. It was not that his resolve to marry her wavered; he fully intended to keep his promise to her, but he found he must wait the proper time, the right opportunity for revealing to his parents the fact of his engagement to her, — which engagement he never for a long time dreamed of repudiating. But after a few days, during which there had been no return to their former familiarity, it was with a fearful kind of relief that he learned she was gone to pay a visit to an old grandmother in the country. He did not care that she had gone without taking leave of him, only wondered if she could have said anything to incriminate him. The session came to an end while she was still absent. He took a formal leave of her aunt, and went home to Stonecross.

His father at once felt a wider division between them than before, and his mother was now compelled, much against her will, to acknowledge to herself its existence. At the

SALTED WITH FIRE

same time he carried himself with less arrogance, and seemed humbled rather than uplifted by his success. During the year that followed he made several visits to Edinburgh, and before long received a presentation to a living in the gift of his father's landlord, a certain duke who had always been friendly to the well-to-do and unassuming tenant of one of his largest farms in the north. Neither upon nor since these visits had he inquired about or heard anything of Isy; but even now, when, without blame, he might have taken steps toward the fulfilment of the promise which he had made her, and which he had never ceased to regard as binding, he could not yet persuade himself that the right time had come for revealing it to his parents, for he knew it would be a great blow to his mother to learn that he had so handicapped his future, and he feared the silent face of his father listening to the announcement of it.

It is hardly necessary to say that he had made no attempt to establish any correspondence with the poor girl, was by this time not unwilling to forget her, and hoped, indeed, that she had, if not forgotten, at least dismissed from her mind all that had taken place between them. Now and then he would in the night have a few tender thoughts about her, but in the morning they would all be gone, and he would drown

SALTED WITH FIRE

painful reminiscence in the care with which, in duty bound it seemed to him, he would polish and repolish his sentences, aping the style of Chalmers or Robert Hall, and occasionally inserting some quotation whose fine sound made him covet it; for apparent richness of composition was his principal aim, not truth of meaning, or lucidity of utterance.

I can hardly be presumptuous in adding that, although thus growing in a certain popularity, he was not growing in favour with God, for who can that makes the favour of man his aim! And as he continued to hear nothing about Isy, the hope at length, bringing with it a keen shoot of pleasure, awoke in him that he was never to hear of her any more. For the praise of men, and the love of that praise, had now restored him to his own good graces, and he thought of himself with more interest and approbation than ever before; hence his forgetting of Isy and his promises. His continued omission of inquiry after her, notwithstanding the predicament in which he might possibly have placed her, was a far worse sin, because deliberate, than his primary wrong to her, and it was that which now recoiled upon him in his increase of hardness and self-satisfaction.

And now, in love with himself, and so shut out from the salvation of love to another, he was

SALTED WITH FIRE

specially in danger of falling in love with any woman's admiration, — whence now occurred a little episode in his history, not quite so insignificant as it may appear.

He had not been more than a month or two in his parish, when he was attracted by a certain young woman in his congregation, of some in-born refinement and distinction of position, to whom he speedily became anxious to recommend himself; he must have her approval, and, if possible, her admiration! So in preaching, if the word used for the lofty, simple utterance of divine messengers may be misapplied to his paltry memorisations, his main thought was always whether she was justly appreciating the eloquence and wisdom with which he meant to impress her, — while he was in truth incapable of understanding how deep her natural insight penetrated him and his pretensions. He did understand, however, that she gave him no small encouragement; and thus making him only the more eager after her good opinion, he came at last to imagine himself heartily in love with her, — a thing at present impossible to him with any woman, — until, encouraged by the fancied importance of his position, and his own fancied distinction in it, he ventured an offer of his feeble hand and feebler heart, — only to have them, to his surprise, definitely and absolutely

SALTED WITH FIRE

refused. He turned from her door a good deal disappointed, but severely mortified; and, judging it impossible for any woman to keep silence concerning such a refusal, unable also to endure the thought of the gossip to ensue, he began at once to look about him for a refuge, and frankly told his patron the whole story. It happened to suit his grace's plans, and he came speedily to his assistance with the offer of his native parish, whence the soutar's arguing antagonist had just been elevated to a position, probably not a very distinguished one, in the kingdom of heaven. Then it seemed to all but a natural piety that made James Blatherwick exchange his living for the parish where his father and mother lived prospering.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER IV

THE soutar was still meditating on things spiritual, still reading the Gospel of St. John, still making and mending shoes, and still watching the spiritual development of his daughter. She had now unfolded what not a few of the neighbours, with most of whom she was in favour, counted nothing less than beauty. The farm labourers in the vicinity were nearly all more or less her admirers, and many a pair of shoes was carried to her father for the sake of a possible smile from Maggie; but because of a certain awe that was at once felt in her presence, no one had as yet dared a word to her beyond that of greeting or farewell. No one had felt in her anything repellent, but each when he looked upon her became immediately aware of inferiority. Her dark and in a way mysterious beauty had not a little to do with it, for it seemed to suggest behind it a beauty it was unable to reveal.

She was rather but by no means remarkably short in stature, being of a strong active type, altogether well proportioned, with a face won-

SALTED WITH FIRE

derfully calm and clear, and quiet but keen dark eyes. Her complexion owed its white rose tinge to a strong but gentle life, and its few freckles to the pale sun of Scotland, and the breezes she courted bonnetless upon the hills, when she accompanied her father in his walks, or when she carried home some work he had finished. He rejoiced in her delight with the wind, holding that it indicated sympathy with the Spirit whose symbol it was. He loved to think of that Spirit as folding her about, closer and more lovingly than his own cherishing soul, to which never an action of hers, and seldom even a word, caused a throb of anxiety. Of her own impulse, and almost from the moment of her mother's death, she had given herself to his service, doing all the little duties of the house, and, as her strength and faculty grew, with a tenderness of ministration unusual at her years, helping him more and more in his trade, until by degrees she had grown so familiar with the lighter parts of it that he could leave them to her with confidence. As soon as she had cleared away the few things necessary for a breakfast of porridge and milk, to which they held fast, declining the more delicate but far inferior wheaten bread, Maggie would hasten to join her father stooping over his last, for he was a little short-sighted. When he lifted his head you saw that, notwithstanding the

SALTED WITH FIRE

ruggedness of his face, he was a good-looking man, with strong, well-proportioned features, although even on Sundays, when he scrubbed his face unmercifully, there would still remain in some of its furrows lines more than suggestive of ingrained rosin and heel-ball. On week days he was not so careful to remove every sign of the labour by which he earned his bread; but when his work was indeed over till the morning, and he felt himself free to do what he pleased, he would never even touch a book without first carefully washing his hands and face.

In the workshop, Maggie's place was a leather-seated stool like her father's, a yard or so away from his, leaving room for his elbows in drawing out the lingels (*rosined threads*); there she would at once resume the work she had left unfinished the night before. It was a curious trait in the father, early inherited by the daughter, that he would never rise from a finished job, however near the hour for dropping work, without having begun another to go on with in the morning. There was this difference in result between their two modes of working, that, while the daughter was quite as particular and excellent in her finish, it was wonderful how much cleaner she managed to keep her hands. But then to her fell naturally the lighter work for women and children. She declared herself ambitious,

SALTED WITH FIRE

however, of one day making throughout, with her own hands, a perfect pair of top boots.

The advantages to Maggie of constant intercourse with her father were incalculable. Without the least loss to her freedom of thought, nay, on the contrary, to the far more rapid development of her liberty in all true directions, the souter seemed to avoid no subject as unsuitable for the girl's consideration, insisting only on regarding it from the highest attainable point of view. Matters of indifferent import they seldom, if ever, discussed at all; and nothing that she knew her father cared about did Maggie ever allude to with indifference. Full of an honest hilarity, ever ready to break out when occasion occurred, she was incapable of a light word upon a sacred subject. Such merriment or such jokes as one, more than elsewhere, is in danger of hearing among the clergy of any church, from the cause that such are more familiar than other people with the Scriptures, she very seldom heard in her father's company. But she became early aware that he made distinctions: it much depended on the nature of the joke how the souter would take it; and not every one might be capable of perceiving why he should now smile and now keep a severe silence. One thing sure to offend him was a light use of any word of the Lord. If it were

SALTED WITH FIRE

an ordinary man who thus offended, he would rebuke him, — perhaps by asking if he remembered who said the words, perhaps by an irresponsible stillness; but if it was a man in any way specially regarded, he might say something to this effect, “The Maister doesna forget whaur and when he spak thae words: I houp ye do!” Once or twice only in her life had Maggie heard him express himself in such fashion, but it had an immediate and lasting influence upon her personal reverence for Jesus Christ, so different from the killing theological regard of the Saviour then cultivated in Scotland! Indeed the most powerful force in the education of Maggie was the evident attitude of her father towards that Son of Man who was bringing up the children of God to the knowledge of that Father of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. Around His name gathered his whole consciousness and hope of well-being. Nor was it wonderful that certain of his ways of thinking should pass unhindered into the mind of his child, and there show themselves as original and necessary truths. Mingling with her delights in the inanimate powers of Nature, in the sun and the wind, in the rain and the growth, in the running waters and the darkness sown with stars, was a sense of the presence of the Son of Man, such that she

SALTED WITH FIRE

felt he might at any moment appear to her father, or indeed, should it so please Him, to herself. And soon an event occurred which, giving her quite a new object of thought, harmonised and brought into more practical activity all her other thinkings.

Two or three miles away, in the heart of the hills, on the outskirts of the farm of Stonecross, lived an old cottar and his wife. They paid a few shillings of rent to Mr. Blatherwick for the acre or two their ancestors had redeemed from the heather and bog, and with their one son remaining at home gave occasional service when required on the farm. They were much respected both by the farmer and his wife, as well as the small circle to which they were known in the neighbouring village, — better known, and more respected still probably, in the region called the kingdom of heaven. For they were such as he to whom the promise was given, that he should yet see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man; and with such beings, although science has nothing to tell us about them, this worthy pair may yet have had some intercourse. They had long and heartily loved and honoured the soutar, whom they had known before the death of his wife, a God-fearing woman, such as at the time were many in that part of the country, and for both

SALTED WITH FIRE

their sakes had always befriended the motherless Maggie. They could not greatly pity her, seeing she had such a father, yet old Eppie had her occasional moments of anxiety as to how the bairn would grow up without a mother's care. No sooner, however, did the little one begin to show character, than Eppie's doubt began to abate, and long before the time to which my narrative has now come the child and the childlike old woman were fast friends; whence Maggie was often invited to spend a day at Bog-sheuch, — oftener indeed than she felt at liberty to leave her father and their common work, though not oftener than she would have liked to go.

One day about noon, in the early summer, when first the hillsides began to look attractive, a small agricultural cart, such as is now but seldom seen, with little paint except on its two red wheels, and drawn by a thin, long-haired little horse, stopped at the door of the soutar's clay-floored, straw-thatched house, in a back-lane of the village. It was a cart the cottar used in the cultivation of his little holding, and the man who drove it, now nearly middle-aged, was likely to succeed to the hut and acres of Bogsheuch. Both man and equipage were well known to the soutar and Maggie; they had come with an invitation to Maggie,

SALTED WITH FIRE

more pressing than usual, to pay them a visit of a few days.

Father and daughter, consulting together in the presence of Andrew Cormack, arrived at the conclusion that, work being rather slacker than usual, and nobody in need of a promised job which the souter could not finish by himself in good time, she should go. Maggie sprang up joyfully, — not without a little pang at the thought of leaving her father alone, though she knew him quite equal to do all that would be necessary in the house before her return, — and set about preparing their dinner, while Andrew went to execute a few commissions that the mistress and his mother had given him. By the time he returned Maggie was in her Sunday gown, with her week-day wrapper and winsey petticoat in a bundle, for she reckoned on being of some use to Eppie during her visit.

When they had eaten their humble dinner, Andrew brought the cart to the door, and Maggie scrambled into it.

“Tak’ a piece wi’ ye,” said her father; “ye hadna muckle to yer denner, and ye may be hungry again or ye win ower the lang rouch road.”

He went back into the house, and brought her two pieces of oatcake in his hand. She received them with a loving smile, and they

SALTED WITH FIRE

set out at a walking pace, which Andrew did not attempt once to quicken.

It was far from a comfortable carriage, neither was her wisp of straw in the bottom of it very comfortable to sit upon. The change from her stool and from the close attention her work required, to the open air and the free rush of the thoughts that came crowding to her out of the wideness, instead of having to be sought, and sometimes with difficulty retained, put her at once in a blissful mood; so that even the few dull remarks the slow-thinking Andrew made at intervals from his perch on the front of the cart, came to her from the realm of faerie, the mysterious world that lay in the folds of the huddled hills. Everything Maggie saw or heard that afternoon seemed, at least in the retrospect, to wear the glamour of God's imagination which is the birth and the truth of things. Selfishness alone can rub away that divine gilding, without which gold itself is poor indeed.

Suddenly the little horse stood still. Andrew, waking up from a snooze, jumped at once to the ground, and began, still half asleep, to search into the cause of the arrest; for Jess, although she could not make haste, never of her own accord stood still while able to walk. Maggie, however, had for some time noted that they were making very slow progress.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“She’s deid cripple!” said Andrew, straightening his long back from an examination of Jess’s forefeet, and coming to Maggie’s side of the cart with a serious face; “I dinna believe the crater can gang ae step further. Yet I canna see what’s happent her.”

Maggie was on the road before he had done speaking. Andrew tried once more to lead Jess, but at once desisted.

“It wud be fell cruelty!” he said. “We maun jist lowse her and tak’ her gien we can to the How o’ the Mains. They’ll gie her a nicht’s quarters there, puir thing! And we’ll see gien they can tak’ you in as weel, Maggie. The maister ’ll len’ me a horse to come for ye i’ the morning, I haena a doobt.”

“I winna hear o’ ’t!” answered Maggie. “I can tramp the lave o’ the road as weel’s you, Andrew!”

“But I hae a’ thae things to cairry, an’ that ’ll no lea’ me a han’ to help ye ower the burn!” objected Andrew.

“What o’ that?” she returned. “I was sae fell tired o’ sittin’ that my legs are jist like to rin awa’ wi’ me. Lat me jist dook mysel’ i’ the bonny win’,” she added. “Isna it just like awfu’ thin watter, An’rew? Here, gie me a haud o’ that loaf. I’s carry that and my ain bit bundle; syne, I fancy, ye can manage the lave?”

SALTED WITH FIRE

Andrew never had much to say, and this time he had nothing. But her readiness relieved him of some anxiety; his mother would be very uncomfortable if he went home without her!

Maggie's spirits rose to lark-pitch as the darkness came on and deepened. The wind seemed to her now a live gloom, in which, with no eye-bound to the space enclosing her, she could go on imagining after the freedom of her own wild will; and as the world and everything in it disappeared, it grew the easier to imagine Jesus first making the darkness light about him, and then stepping out of it plain before her sight. That could be no trouble to him, she argued, as, being everywhere, he must be there. Besides, he could appear in any form, she thought, because he had made every shape on the earth! "Oh, if only she were fit to see him! Then surely he would come!" Her father had several times spoken to her after this fashion, when talking of the varied appearances of the Lord to his disciples after his resurrection; and had he not then said that he would be with them to the end of the world? Why then might he not be seen of any one of them? Even after he ascended to his Father, had he not appeared to the apostle Paul? and was it not very probable that he had shown himself to many another, although at long intervals through

SALTED WITH FIRE

the ages? In any case he was everywhere, she thought, and always about them, although now, perhaps because of the lack of faith in the earth, he had not been seen for a very long time. And she remembered her father once saying that nobody could even *think* a thing if there was no possible truth in it. It was good for the Lord to go away, said her father, that they might believe in him when out of the sight of him, and so believe in him better and grow stronger in their power to believe. But, indeed, if he was in them, and they were in him, how could they help it?

“I dinna think,” said Maggie aloud to herself, as she trudged along beside the delightfully silent Andrew, “that my father would be the least astonished — only filled wi’ an awfu’ glaidness — if at ony moment, waulkin’ at his side, the Lord were to call him by his name and appear to him. He would but feel as gien he had just steppit oot upon him frae some secret door! I fancy my father sayin’, ‘I thought, Lord, I would see you some day! Eh, ye are good to me, Son o’ my Father! Jist tak’ the life o’ me gien ye like. I was aye greedy efter a sicht o’ ye, Lord, and here ye are. Praise God!’ That ’s what I think my father would say.”

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER V

THE same moment to her ears came the cry of an infant, and her first thought was, "Can that be himsel' come again as he cam' afore?"

She stopped in the dusky starlight, listening with all her soul.

"Andrew!" she cried, for she heard the sound of his steps as he plodded on in front of her with a good mile yet to be traversed, and could vaguely see him, — "Andrew, what was yon?"

"I h'ard naething," answered Andrew, stopping at her cry and listening.

Then came a second cry, a feeble, sad wail, and then both heard it. Maggie darted off in the direction whence it seemed to come; nor had she far to run, for the voice was not one to reach far.

They were at the moment climbing a dreary, desolate ridge by a rough road, a mere stony hollow, in winter a path for the rain rather than the feet of men. On each side of it lay a wild moor, covered with heather and low berry-bearing shrubs; under a big bush Maggie saw something glimmer, and flying to it found it a

SALTED WITH FIRE

child, apparently about a year old, but poorly nourished. With the instinct of a mother, she caught it up, and held it close to her exultant breathless bosom, delighted not only to have found it, but that it ceased wailing the moment it felt the pressure of her arm. Andrew, dropping the things he carried, had started after her, but met her half-way with her new-found treasure. Maggie had never cared for a doll, because it was not alive, but her whole being seemed at once to wrap itself around the baby because it needed her. She all but ran against the pursuing Andrew, having no eyes except for the baby; then avoiding him, began, to his amazement, to run down the hill, back the way they had come; she thought of nothing but carrying the child home to her father. But here even the slow perception of her companion understood her.

“Maggie, Maggie,” he cried, “ye ’ll baith be deid afore ye win hame wi’ ’t. Come on to my mither. There never was woman like her for bairns! She ’ll ken a hantle better what to do wi’ ’t!”

Maggie at once recovered her reason, and knew he was right. But at the moment she had an insight that never left her; she understood the heart of the Son of Man, who came to find and carry back all the stray children to their Father and his. When afterward she told her

SALTED WITH FIRE

father what she then felt, he answered her with just four words, —

“Lassie, ye hae't!”

She wrapped the baby in the winsey petticoat, lest it should grow cold while she carried it through the night-air. Andrew took up his loaf and his other packages. They set out again, Maggie's heart overwhelmed with gladness. Had the precious thing been twice the weight of the solid little lump it was, so exuberant were her feelings of wealth and delight that she could have carried it twice the distance with ease, and that though the road was so rough that she went in terror of stumbling. Andrew gave now and then a queer chuckle at the ludicrousness of their home-coming, and every other minute had to stop and pick up one of his many parcels; but Maggie strode in front, full of possession, and with a feeling of having now entered upon her heavenly inheritance. She was almost startled when suddenly, as it seemed to her, they came in sight of the turf cottage, in whose little window an oil lamp was burning. Before they reached it the door opened, and Eppie appeared with an overflow of questions and anxious welcome.

“What on earth —” she began.

“It's naething but a bonny wee bairnie wha's mither has tint it!” interrupted Maggie, flying up to her, and laying the child in her arms.

SALTED WITH FIRE

Mrs. Cormack stood and stared, now at Maggie, and now at the bundle that lay in her arms. Tenderly, at length, the old mother, searching in the petticoat, found the little one's face, and uncovered the sleeping child.

"Eh, the puir mither!" she said — and covered again the tiny countenance.

"It's mine!" cried Maggie. "I faund it honest!"

"Its mither may ha' lost it honest, Maggie!" said Eppie.

"Weel, its mither can come for't gien she want it! It's mine till she does, ony gait!" rejoined the girl.

"Nae doobt o' that!" replied the old woman, scarcely questioning that the infant had been left to perish by some worthless tramp. "Ye'll maybe hae 't langer nor ye'll care to keep it!"

"That's no verra likely," answered Maggie, with a smile, as she stood in the doorway, in the wakeful night of the northern summer; "it's ane o' the Lord's ain lammies that he cam' to the hills to seek. He's fund this ane!"

"Weel, weel, my bonnie doo, it sanna be for me to contradick ye! But wae's upo' me for a menseless auld wife! Come in; come in; ye're the mair welcome that ye hae been sae lang expectit. Bless me, An'rew, what hae ye dunc wi' the cairt and the beastie?"

SALTED WITH FIRE

In a few words, for brevity was easy to him, Andrew told the story of their disaster.

“It maun hae been the Lord’s mercy! The beastie bude to suffer for the sake of the bairnie! He maybe wants to mak’ something o’ him bye the common!”

She got them their supper, which was keeping hot by the fire, and then sent Maggie to her bed in the ben-end, where she laid the baby beside her, after washing him and wrapping him in her own newest shift. But Maggie scarcely slept for listening lest the baby’s breathing should stop. Eppie sat in the kitchen with Andrew until the light, slowly travelling round the north, deepened in the east, and at last climbed the sky, leading up the sun himself. Then Andrew rose, and set his face towards Stonecross, in full but not very anxious expectation of a stormy reception from his mistress before he had time to explain. He would gladly have said as little as possible about their treasure trove, but reflecting that the mistress was terrible at “speirin’ questions,” he resolved to tell her all about it. When he reached home, however, the house was not yet astir; and he had time to feed and groom his horses before any one was about, so that no explanation was necessary as to the hour when he returned.

All the next day Maggie was ill at ease,

SALTED WITH FIRE

dreading the appearance of a mother. The baby seemed nothing the worse for his exposure, and although thin and pale seemed a healthy child, and took heartily the food provided for him. He was decently though poorly clad, and very clean. The tale of his finding was speedily known in the neighbourhood, for the Cormacks made inquiry at every farmhouse and cottage within range of the moor; but to the satisfaction of Maggie at least, who fretted to get home with her treasure, it had no result, and by the time the period of her visit arrived, she had begun to feel tolerably safe in her possession, with which she returned in triumph to her father.

The long-haired horse not yet proving equal to the journey, she had to walk home; but Eppie herself accompanied her, bent on taking her share in the burden of the child, which Maggie was with difficulty persuaded to yield. Eppie indeed carried him up to the soutar's door, but Maggie insisted on herself laying him in her father's arms. The soutar rose from his stool, received him like Simeon taking the infant Jesus from the arms of his mother, and held him high like a heave-offering to Him that had sent him forth from the hidden Holiest of Holies. For a moment he held him thus in silence, then, restoring him to his daughter, sat

SALTED WITH FIRE

down again, and took up his last and shoe. But becoming suddenly aware of his breach of manners, he rose again, saying, —

“I crave yer pardon, Mistress Cormack. I was clean forgettin’ ony breedin’ I ever had! Maggie, tak’ oor freen ben the hoose, and gar her rest her a bit while ye get something for her to eat and drink efter her long walk. I’ll be ben mysel’ in a minute or twa to hae a crack wi’ her. I hae but a few stitches mair to put intill this same sole! We maun tak’ some serious coonsel thegither, the three o’ ’s, anent the up-bringin’ o’ this God-sent bairn! I dootna but he’s come wi’ a blessin’ to this hoose, and Maggie, and me. It was a’ in sic mercifu’ wise arrangement, baith for the puir bairn and Maggie, that they sud that nicht come thegither. Verily, He shall give his angels charge over thee! They maun hae been aboot the muir, maybe a’ that day, that nane but Maggie sud get a haud o’ ’im — as they were aboot the field and the flock and the shepherds and the inn-stable a’ that nicht!”

The same moment entered a neighbour who, having heard and misinterpreted the story before, had now caught sight of the arrival.

“Eh, soutar, but ye’re a man sair oppressed by Providence!” she said. “Wha think ye’s been i’ the faut here?”

SALTED WITH FIRE

The wrath of the soutar sprang up flaming.

“Gang oot o’ my hoose, ye ill-thoughtit wuman!” he cried. “Gang oot this verra meenit—and comena in again till it’s to beg my pardon and that o’ my bonny lass. The Lord God bless her frae ill tongues — gang oot, I tell ye.”

The outraged father had risen towering. All the town knew him for a man of gentle temper and great courtesy. The woman stood one moment dazed and uncertain, then turned and ran from the house; and when the soutar joined Mrs. Cormack and Maggie, he said never a word about her. When Eppie had taken her tea, she rose and bade them good-night, nor crossed another threshold in the village.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER VI

BUT that same night, when the baby had gone to sleep, Maggie went back to the kitchen where her father still sat at work.

“Ye’re late the night, father!” she said.

“I am that, lassie; but ye see I canna luik for help frae you for some time; for ye’ll hae eneuch to dae wi’ that bairn o’ yours; and we hae him to feed noo as weel’s oorsel’s! No ’at I hae the least concern about the bonny white raven, only we maun consider him!”

“It’s little he’ll want for a whilie at least, father!” answered Maggie. “But noo,” she went on, in a tone of seriousness that was almost awe, “lat me hear what ye’re thinkin’. What kin’ o’ a mither could hae left her bairn i’ the wide, eerie nicht — and what for?”

“It maun jist hae been some puir lassie that didna think o’ His wull, or the consequences o’ gaein’ against it. She hadna learnt to consider! She believet the man whan he promised to merry her, no kennin’ he was a leear, and no heedin’ the voice that spak inside her and said ye maunna, sae she loot him dee what he likit wi’

SALTED WITH FIRE

her, and mak' himsel' the father o' a bairnie that wasna meant for him. He took leeberties wi' her she ouchtna to hae permittit, sae that she was a mither afore ever she was merried. Sic as dae that hae an awfu' time o' 't; fowk hardly ever forgies them, but aye luiks doon upo' them. The rascal ran awa' and left her; nae-body would help her; she had to beg the breid for hersel', and the drap milk for the bairnie that had dune nae wrang, but had to thole a great wrang frae its ain faither and mither."

"I kenna whilk o' them was the warst!" cried Maggie.

"Nae mair do I!" answered the soutar; "but I doobt the ane that lee'd to the ither."

"There canna be mony sic men!" said Maggie.

"'Deed there's a heap o' men no a hair better!" rejoined her father; "but wae's me for the puir lassie that believes them!"

"But she kenned what was richt a' the time, father!"

"That's true, my dautie; but to ken is no to un'erstan'; and even to un'erstan' is no aye to obey! No woman's safe that hasna the love o' God, the great Love, in her hert a' the time. What's best in her, whan the very best's awa', is her greatest danger. And the higher ye rise ye

SALTED WITH FIRE

come into the waur danger, till ance ye 're fairly intill the ae safe place, the hert o' the Father. There, and there only, ye're safe! — safe frae earth, frae hell, and frae yer ain hert! A' the temptations, even sic as ance made the heavenly hosts themsel's fa' frae h'aven to hell, canna touch ye there! But when man or wuman repents and heumbles themsel', there is He to lift them up, and that higher than ever they were afore! — higher than ever they could hae won without the sair lesson o' that fa'!"

“ Syne they're no to be despised that fa'!”

“ Nane despises them, lassie, but them that haena yet learnt that they're in danger o' that same fa' themsel's. Mony ane, I'm thinking, is keepit frae fa'in' jist because she's no far eneuch on, to get ony guid o' the shame, but would jist sink farther and farther!”

“ But auld Eppie tells me that maist o' them 'at trips gangs on fa'in', and never wins up again.”

“ Ou, ay; that's a' that we, short-lived and short-sichtit cratur, see o' them! but this warl's but the beginnin', and the glory o' Christ, wha's the veesible Love o' the Father, spreads a heap farther nor that. It's no for naething we're tellt hoo the sinner-women cam' till him frae a' sides! They needit him sair, and cam'. Never ane o' them was over black to be latten gang close up till him; and some o' sic women

SALTED WITH FIRE

un'erstude things that he said, sic as mony a respectable wuman couldna get a glimp o'! There's aye rain eneuch, as Maister Shaksper says, i' the sweet h'avens to wash the vera han' o' murder as white as snow. The creatin' hert is fu' o' sic rain. Lo'e *him*, lassie, and ye'll never glaur the bonny goon ye broocht white frae his hert!"

The soutar's face was solemn and white, and tears were running down the furrows of his cheeks. Maggie too was weeping. At length she said, —

"Supposin' the mither o' my bairnie a wuman like that, can ye think it fair that *her* disgrace should stick till *him*?"

"It sticks till him only in sic minds as never saw the lovely greatness o' God."

"But sic bairns comena intill the warl' as God would hae them come!"

"But your bairnie *is* come, and that he couldna withoot the creatin' wull o' the great Father. Doobtless they hae to suffer frae the prood jeedgment o' their fellow-men, but they may get muckle guid and little ill frae that, and a guid naebody can reive them o'. It's no a mere veesitin' o' the sins o' the fathers upo' the bairns, but a provision to haud the bairns aff o' the like, and to shame the fathers o' them. Eh, but they need to be sair affrontit wi' themsel's wha dis-

SALTED WITH FIRE

grace at ance the wife that should hae been and the bairn that shouldna! Eh! the puir bairnie that has sic a father! But he has anither as weel,— a richt gran' father to rin till. The ae thing," the soutar went on, "that you and me, Maggie, has to do, is never to let the bairn ken the miss o' father or mother, and sae lead him to the ae Father, the only real and true ane. There he 's wailin', the bonny wee man!"

Maggie ran to quiet him, but soon returned, and, sitting down again beside her father, asked him for a piece of work.

And all this time, through his own indifference, the would-be-grand preacher, James Blatherwick, knew nothing of the fact that, somewhere in the world, without father or mother, lived and breathed a silent witness against him.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER VII

FOR some time Isy had contrived to postpone her return to her aunt, — that was, until James was gone; for she dreaded being in the house, lest it should lead to the discovery of the relation between them. But soon she had to encounter the appalling fact that the dread moment was on its way when she could no longer conceal the change in her condition; and her first thought then was the good name of her lover, — to avoid involving him in the approaching ruin of her reputation. With this intent she vowed to God and to her own soul absolute silence with regard to the past. James's name even should never pass her lips! Nor did she find her vow hard to keep, even when her aunt took measures to make her disclose her secret; but the dread lest in her pains she should cry out for the comfort which James alone could give her, almost drove her to poison, — from yielding to which temptation only the thought of his child restrained her. Filled with fear, and hopeless of any good, enabled only by the inexorable inevitability that held her, she passed at length through the crisis of that agony which

SALTED WITH FIRE

no man but the Son of Man can understand, and found herself alive and breathless on the other side. In the glad calm of her relief, she locked tight her lips, and no more ever feared being tempted to name the father of her child. Thus the poor girl who was weak enough to imperil her good name for love of a worthless man, grew strong through that love to shield him. Whether in this she did well for the world, for truth, or for her own soul, she never wasted a thought on the matter. In vain did her aunt ply her with questions, promising never to utter a word of reproach if only she would speak the one name; she was rigidly obstinate. She felt that to comply would be to wrong him, and so to lose her last righteous hold upon the man who had at least once loved her a little. Through shame and blame, she clung to his scathlessness as the one only joy left her. She had not a gleam, not even a shadow, of hope for herself. He had most likely all but forgotten her very existence, for he had never written to her, or, so far as she knew, made the least effort to discover what had become of her. She, on her part also, had never written to him; but how could he fail to know the motive of her quiescence! At the same time she clung to the conviction that he could never have heard of what had befallen her.

SALTED WITH FIRE

By and by she grew able to reflect that remaining where she was would be the ruin of her aunt; for who would lodge in the same house with *her*? In her exhausted physical condition, her longing to go, and the impossibility of going at once, or even of thinking where to go, so wrought upon her brain, already weakened by the demands of the baby, that she was on the very verge of despair, but again strength came to her from the thought of her child, and for his sake she lived on. One shred of the cloud, however, that had at one time all but overwhelmed her intellect, remained, — the fixed idea that, agonising as had been her effort after silence, she had failed in her resolve and broken the promise she imagined she had given to James; that she had been false to her lover, had brought him to shame, and for ever ruined his prospects; she had betrayed him, she thought, first, into the power of her aunt, and then, through her, to the authorities of the church! That was why she never heard a word from him! She was never to see him any more! The conviction, the seeming consciousness, so grew upon her, along with the sense of the impossibility of remaining with her aunt, that, one morning, when her infant was not yet a month old, she crept from the house and wandered out into the world, with just one shilling

SALTED WITH FIRE

in a purse forgotten in the pocket of her dress. Then for a time her memory seemed to have lost all hold upon her consciousness, and all that befell her remained a blank, refusing to be recalled.

When she began to come to herself, she had no knowledge of where she had been, or for how long her mind had been astray; all seemed a dread blank, crossed with cloud-like trails of blotted dreams, and vague survivals of gratitude for bread and pieces of money. Everything she became aware of surprised her; but one thing she never seemed to become aware of, or be surprised at, so could never have forgotten, — the child in her arms. Her story had been plain to everyone she met, and she had received thousands of kindnesses which her memory could not hold, though doubtless they would all return to her one day. At length she found herself — whether intentionally or not she could not tell — in a neighbourhood to which she had heard James Blatherwick refer.

But here again a blank stopped her backward gaze. Then suddenly she grew aware, and knew that she was aware, of being alone on a wide moor in a dim night, hungry, with her hungry child, to whom she had given the last drop of nourishment he could draw from her, wailing in her arms. Then once more there

SALTED WITH FIRE

fell upon her a hideous despair. Worn out with walking, and unable to carry him a step farther, she dropped him from her helpless hands into a bush. But he was starving, and she must get him some milk. She went staggering about, looking under the great stones, and into the clumps of heather, for something he could drink. At last, I presume, she sank on the ground, and was for a time insensible; anyhow, when she came to herself she could nowhere find the child, or even the place where she had left him.

The same evening it was that Maggie came along with Andrew and found the baby, as I have already told. All that night, and a great part of the next day also, Isy went searching about, with intervals of compelled repose. Imagining at length that she had discovered the very spot where she left him, and coming to the conclusion that some wild beast had come upon the helpless thing and carried him off, she rushed to a peat-hag whence the gleam of water came to her eye, and would there have drowned herself, but was turned aside by a man who threw down his flaughter spade and ran between her and the frightful hole. He tried to console her with the assurance that no child left on that moor could be in other than luck's way, and directed her to the next town, with a few

SALTED WITH FIRE

halfpence in her pocket, and a threat of hanging if she made another attempt of the sort. A long time of wandering followed, with ceaseless inquiry, and alternating disappointment and expectation. Every day something occurred that served to keep the life in her; and at last she reached the county-town, where she was taken to the poorhouse for a time.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER VIII

JAMES BLATHERWICK was proving himself not unacceptable to the parish where first he opened his eyes, and was thought a very rising man, inasmuch as his fluency was far ahead of his perspicuity. He soon came to regard the souter as a man far ahead of the rest of his parishioners, but he saw, at the same time, that he was looked upon by far the greater number as a wild fanatic, if not as a dangerous heretic. But while he himself had little inclination to differ with the souter, he perceived almost at once that for his acceptability he had far better differ than agree with him, and that at least, until his influence was more firmly established, it would be well to seem as much of the same mind with his congregation as he could without loss to his eloquence. He must for the present, therefore, use the doctrinal phrases he had been accustomed to in his youth, or others so like that they would be taken to indicate unchanged opinions; while for his part he practised a mental reservation in regard to them

SALTED WITH FIRE

until he should have gained such authority as justified him in preaching what he pleased without regard to consequences. This goal of acknowledged eloquence, such, that is, as ignorant and wordy people count eloquence, he had already gained; but such insight into truth as even his father and a few other plain people in the neighbourhood possessed, he showed little sign indeed of ever attaining.

What he saw in the souter was at first merely negative. He had noted, indeed, that he used almost none of the set phrases of the good people in the village, who devoutly followed the traditions of the elders; but he knew little as to what it really was that the souter did not believe, and far less as to what he did believe, and that with all his heart and soul. John MacLear could not utter the name of God without a confession of faith immeasurably beyond anything inhabiting the consciousness of the parson; while he soon began to note the absence of all enthusiasm in James with regard to such things on which his very position implied an absolute acceptance, he would allude to any or all of them as if they were the merest matters of course. Never did his face light up when he spoke of the Son of God, of his death, or of his resurrection from the dead; never did he make mention of the kingdom of heaven as

SALTED WITH FIRE

if it were anything more venerable than the kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

But the soul of the souter would venture far into the twilight, searching after the things of God, opening wider its eyes as the darkness widened around them. On one occasion the parson took upon him to remonstrate with what seemed to him the audacity of his parishioner.

"Don't you think you are just going a little bit too far there, Mr. MacLear?" he said.

"Ye mean ower far intill the dark, Mr. Blatherwick?"

"Yes, that is what I mean. You speculate too boldly."

"But in that direction, plainly the dark grows thinner, though I grant ye there 's nothing yet to ca' licht. That ye ken by its ain fair shinin', and by noucht else."

"But the human soul is as apt to deceive itself as is the human eye, with a flash inside it!" said Blatherwick.

"Nae doot; but whan the true licht comes, ye aye ken the differ! A man *may* tak' the dark for licht, but he canna tak' the licht for darkness!"

"But there must be something for the light to shine upon, else the man sees nothing," said the parson.

"There 's thought, and possible insicht i' the

SALTED WITH FIRE

man!" said the soutar to himself. — "Maybe, like the Ephesians, ye haena yet fund oot gien there be ony Holy Ghost, sir?" he said to his companion.

"No man dares deny that!"

"But a man mayna ken 't, though he daursna deny 't! Nane but them 'at follows whaur he leads, can ken that he verily is."

"We have to beware of private interpretation!"

"Gien a man has nae word till his ain sel', he has nae word to lippen till. The Scripture is but a sealed buik till him; he walks i' the dark. The licht is neither pairtit nor gethered. Gien a man has licht, he has nane the less that there 's anither present; gien there be twa or three prayin' thegither, the fourth may hae nane o' 't, and ilk ane o' the three has jist what he 's able to receive, and he kens 't in himsel' as licht. Gien it comena to ilk ane o' them a', it doesna come to them a'. Ilk ane maun hae the revelation intill his ain sel', as gien there wasna ane mair present. And gien it be sae, which I'm no thinkin' ye'll fin' it hard to admit, hoo are we to win at ony truth no yet revealed, 'cep' we gang oot intill the dark to meet it? Ye maun caw canny, I admit, i' the mirk; but ye maun caw gien ye wad win at onything!"

SALTED WITH FIRE

“But suppose you know enough to keep you going, and do not care to venture into the dark?”

“Gien a man hauds on practeesin’ what he kens, the hunger ’ill wauk in him efter something mair. I’m thinkin’ the angels desired lang afore they could see intill certain things they wantit to ken aboot, but ye may be sure they warnna left withoot as muckle licht as would serve honest fowk to haud them gaein’ or desirin’!”

“Suppose they couldn’t tell whether what they saw was true light or not?”

“They had to fa’ back upo’ the wull o’ the great Licht; we ken He wants us a’ to see as he does himsel’. If ye carena to seek that sicht, ye ’re jist naething and naegait, and are in sore need o’ sharp disciplen.”

“I’m afraid I can’t follow you quite. The fact is, I have been for a long time occupied so closely with the Bible history, and the new discoveries that bear testimony to the same, that I’ve had but little time to give to metaphysics.”

“And what ’s the guid o’ history, or sic metaphysics as is the vera sowl o’ history, but to help ye to see Christ wi’ yer understandin’ as weel as wi’ yer hert? and what ’s the guid o’ seein’ Christ but sae to see God wi’ yer hert and yer understandin’ also, and ken that yer

SALTED WITH FIRE

seein' him, and sae to receive him intill yer vera natur? Ye min' hoo the Lord said that nane could ken his Father, but him to whom the Son would reveal him? Man, sir, it's time ye had a glimp' o' that! Ye ken naething till ye ken God; and he's the only ane a man can truly and really ken."

"Well, you're a long way ahead of me, and for the present I'm afraid there's nothing for it but to say good-night to you!"

And therewith the minister departed.

"Lord," said the soutar, as he sat on his stool, and guided his awl through sole and welt and upper of the shoe on his last, "there's surely something workin' i' the young man! Surely he canna be that far frae waukin' up to ken that he kens naething! Lord, pu' doon the dyke o' learnin' and self-righteousness that he canna see ower to thee upo' the ither side o' 't. Lord, sen' him the open grace o' eyes, that he may see whaur and what he is, and cry oot wi' the lave o' us, puir blin' bodies, that hae begun to see, to him that hasna, 'Awauk, thoo that sleepest and get oot o' thy grave, that thoo may see the licht o' the Father i' the face o' the Son.'"

But the minister went away trying to classify the soutar, whom he thought to place in some certain sect of middle-age mystics. Thence-

SALTED WITH FIRE

forward, nevertheless, something which he did not know seemed to haunt the man. That part of him which he called his religious sense appeared to know something of which he himself knew nothing! Faithlessly as he had behaved to Isy, Blatherwick was not consciously, that is, with the least purpose of intent, a deceitful man; he had always cherished a strong faith in his own honour. But faith in a thing, in an idea, in a notion, is no proof, or even sign, that the thing exists, especially when it has its root in a man's thought of himself, in a man's presentation to himself of his own reflected self. This man who thought so much of his honour was in truth a moral unreality, a cowardly fellow, a sneak who, in the hope that no consequences would overtake him, carried himself as beyond reproof. How should such a one ever have the power of spiritual vision developed in him? How should such a one ever see God, — ever exist in the same region in which the soutar had long taken up his abode? Still, there was this much reality in him, and he had made this much progress, that, holding fast by his resolve henceforth no more to slide, he had also a dim suspicion of something he had not seen, but which he might become able to see, and was half resolved to think and read for the future with the intent to find out what

SALTED WITH FIRE

this strange man knew, if, indeed, he did know anything more than everybody else. Unable, however, to be sure of anything, let him try as hard as he might, he soon became weary of the effort, and sank back into self-satisfied blind sleep.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER IX

BUT out of this quiescence a pang from the past suddenly one morning awaked him, and in his pain, almost without consciousness of a volition, he found himself at the soutar's door. Maggie opened it to him with the baby in her arms. She had just been having a game with the child; her face was in a glow, her hair tossed about, and her dark eyes flashing with excitement. To Blatherwick, without any great natural interest in life, and in the net of a trouble which caused him no immediate apprehension, and was of no absorbing interest, the poor girl, of so little account in the world, and so far below him, as he took for granted, somehow affected him at the moment as beautiful; and, indeed, she was beautiful, far more beautiful than he was yet able to appreciate. Besides, it was not long since he had been refused by another; and just at such a time, as Shakspeare must have remarked, a man is readiest to fall in love afresh. Trouble then, lack of interest, and late repulse had laid James's heart, such as it was, unexpectedly open to assault from a

SALTED WITH FIRE

new quarter threatening no danger. Painfully warned by late experience against a second time encouraging personal relations with a poor girl of lowly origin, he could not help being interested in her, both because of her beauty and because of her evident discipleship to her father, to whom the young parson had not infrequently been listening of late, with Maggie silently at work beside him. But he had not as yet taken sufficient interest in either to ask who the child was whom she was nursing so tenderly, and whom he had once or twice seen her ministering to with such assiduity.

“That’s a very fine baby!” he said, forgetting to inquire after her father, who had been a trifle ailing. “Whose is he?”

“Mine, sir,” answered Maggie, with some triumph, but a little abruptly, — for like a mother she was ready to resent ignorance with regard to her treasure.

“Oh, indeed; I did not know,” answered the parson, bewildered.

“At least,” Maggie resumed a little hurriedly, and stopped — whereupon the parson would at once have concluded, except for her extreme youth, that she was herself the mother of the child. Now he feared to prosecute the inquiry without first seeking enlightenment from his housekeeper.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Is your father in the house, Maggie?” he asked, and without waiting for an answer, went on, “It is much too heavy for you to carry about.”

“No ae bit!” she rejoined, as if he meant to disparage her strength; “and who’s to carry him but me?”

Huddling the child to her bosom, she continued to address him, —

“And would he hae my pet gang traivellin’ the warl’ upo’ thae twa bonny wee legs o’ his ain, wantin’ the wings he left ahint him whan he cam’? They maun grow a heap stronger first. It’ll come a’ in guid time! His ain mammie’s strang eneuch to carry him gien he war twice the size! Noo, come but the hoose and see daddy.”

This also was addressed to the child, with whom she went at once to the kitchen, followed by the minister, growing more and more confused.

There sat her father as usual, hands and knees in skilful consort of labour.

“Weel, minister, hoo are ye the day? Is the yerd ony lichter upo’ the tap o’ ye?” said the soutar, with a smile that was almost pawky.

“I do not understand you, Mr. MacLear.”

“Na, ye canna. Gien ye could, ye wouldna be sae comfortable as ye seem.”

SALTED WITH FIRE

“I cannot think, Mr. MacLear, why you seem rude to me.”

“Ye’re richt, sir; *seem* is the proper word. But gien ye saw the hoose on fire aboot him ye maybe wouldna be polite yersel’ tae a man in a drucken sleep.”

“Dare you imply that I have been drinking?” cried the parson.

“Not for a single moment, sir; and I beg yer pardon for raisin’ the simile thoughtlessly; I dinna believe ye war ever ance owertaen wi’ drink in a’ yer life, sir! And maybe I shouldna be sae ready to speyk in parables, for as no a’body that can or wull un’erstan’ them. But ye canna hae forgotten that cry o’ the Apostle o’ the Gentiles, — ‘Wauk up, thoo that sleepest!’ And divna ye min’ whaur the man he cried till was sleeping? It was whaur ane micht think the chance o’ his hearin’ was but sma’! But what’s impossible, ye ken, is possible, and *vera* possible, wi’ God. Even the deid wauk whan the trumpet blast batters at their lugs!”

“It seems to me that the Apostle makes allusion in that passage to the condition of the Gentile nations. But it may apply as well, doubtless, to the conversion of every unbelieving man of being converted from the error of his ways.”

“Weel, are *ye* convertit, sir? Or are ye but

SALTED WITH FIRE

turnin', noo and than, frac side to side o' yer coffin, — seekin' a sleepin' assurance that ye 're waukin'?"

"You are plain-spoken, anyway!" said the minister, rising.

"Maybe I am at last, sir! And maybe I hae been ower lang in comin' to the plainness! Maybe I was ower-feart for yer coontin' me — or, maybe, for *bein'* ill-fashiont — what ye ca' *rude!*"

The parson was half-way to the door, for he was angry — which can hardly surprise any reader. But, with the latch in his hand, he turned. There, in the middle of the floor, with the child in her arms, stood the beautiful Maggie, as if in act to follow him. He had forgotten them. Both were staring after him.

"Dinna anger him, father," said Maggie. "Maybe he disna ken better!"

"Weel ken I, my dautie, that he disna ken better. But I canna help thinkin' he's maybe no that faur frae the waukin'. God grant I be richt aboot that! Eh, gien he would but wauk up, what a man he would mak'! He kens a heap — but what's that whan a man has no licht!"

"I certainly do not see things as you would have me believe you saw them; and you are hardly capable of persuading me, I fear!" re-

SALTED WITH FIRE

marked Blatherwick, with the angry flush again on his face; it had for a moment been replaced with pallor.

Here the baby seemed to have recognised the unsympathetic in the tone of the conversation, for his little face, which had for a moment or two been slowly changing, at length pulled down its lovely little mouth, and sent from it a dread and potent cry. Claspng him close to her bosom, Maggie ran from the room with him, jostling James in the doorway as he stood aside to let her pass.

“I am afraid I spoke without due regard to the infant’s presence, and frightened the little man,” he said.

“’Deed, sir, it may ha’ been you, or it may ha’ been me,” rejoined the soutar. “It’s a thing I’m sair to blame in, — that whan I’m in richt earnest, I’m aye ower-ready to speyk as gien I was angert. I’m feart it indicates a fac’ — namely, that I am angert! Sir, I humbly beg yer pardon.”

“As humbly I beg yours,” returned the parson; “I was in the wrong.”

The heart of the old man was drawn afresh to the youth. He laid aside his shoe, and, turning on his stool, took James’s hand in both of his, and said solemnly and lovingly, —

“This moment I would willingly die, sir, so

SALTED WITH FIRE

be that thereby the licht o' that uprising o' which we spak micht brak throuw upon ye!"

"I believe you, sir," answered James, "but," he went on with an attempt at humour, "it would n't be so much for you to do, after all, seeing you would straightway find yourself in a better place!"

"Maybe whaur the penitent thief sat, some auchteen hunner year ago, waiting to be called up higher!" rejoined the soutar, with a watery smile.

The parson opened the door, and went home — where his knees found their way to the carpet.

From that day Blatherwick began to go oftener to the soutar's, and before long went almost every other day, for at least a few minutes; and on such occasions had generally a short interview with Maggie and the baby, in both of whom, having heard from the soutar the story of the child, he took a growing interest.

"You seem to love him as if he were your own, Maggie!" he said one morning to the girl.

"And isna he my ain? Didna God himsel' gie me the bairn intill my vera airms — or a' but?" she rejoined.

"Suppose he were to die!" suggested the minister. "Such children often do."

SALTED WITH FIRE

“I needna think aboot that,” she answered. “I would just hae to say, as mony ane has had to say afore me: ‘The Lord gave,’—ye ken the rest, sir.”

Day by day Maggie grew more beautiful in the minister’s eyes, until at last he was not only ready to say that he loved her, but for her sake to disregard all worldly and ambitious considerations.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER X

ON the morning of a Saturday, therefore, which day of the week he always made a holiday, he resolved to let her know without delay that he loved her; and he was the more determined, because on the next day he had to preach for a brother clergyman at Deemouth, and felt that, with this on his mind, he would not have it clear enough to do well in the pulpit. But neither disappointment nor new love had yet served to free him from vanity or arrogance. Although he had been for some time cherishing the resolve, he still regarded his approaching declaration as conferring a great honour as well as favour upon the damsel of low estate; for was she not about to share in his growing distinction? In his late invitation to a lady to descend a little from her social pedestal, he had believed himself to offer her a greater than proportionate counter-elevation, and in his present suit to Maggie he was unable to conceive the possibility of failure. When she appeared she would have shown him into the kitchen, but he took her by the arm and led her to the ben-end,

SALTED WITH FIRE

where at once he began his intended speech. Scarce had she gathered his meaning, however, when he was checked by the startled look upon her face.

“And what am I to do wi’ my bairn?” she asked instantly, without sign of hesitation or perplexity, and smiled on the little one as at some absurdity in her arms rather than in her mind.

But now the minister was sufficiently in love to disregard these unexpected indications. His pride was indeed a little hurt, — and hurt in that quarter could not be less than a serious one to him; but he resisted any show of it, reflecting that the feeling she manifested was not altogether an unnatural one.

“Oh, we shall easily find some experienced mother,” he answered, “who will understand better than you how to take care of him!”

“Na, na!” she answered. “I hae baith a father and a wean to luik efter, and that’s aboot as muckle as I’ll ever be up till!”

So saying, she rose and carried the little one up the stair to the room her father now occupied, nor cast a single glance of farewell in the direction of her lover.

And now at last he was not a little astonished. Did it, could it, mean that she did not appreciate his offer, and could not listen to him? Impos-

SALTED WITH FIRE

sible! Her devotion to the child she had picked up was indeed absurdly engrossing, but that would come all right very soon. He need not fear such a rivalry as that, however unpleasant it might be at the moment. That little vagrant, indeed, from no one could tell where, to come between him and the girl he would honour by making his wife!

He glanced round him; the room looked very empty. He heard her oft interrupted step through the thin floor that divided them; she was lavishing caresses on the insensate little animal! He caught up his hat, and with a flushed face of annoyance went straight to the soutar where he sat at work.

"I have come to ask you, Mr. MacLear, if you will give me your daughter to be my wife," he said.

"Ow, sae that's it!" returned the soutar, without raising his eyes from his occupation.

"You have no objection, I hope?" continued the minister, finding he did not go on.

"What says she hersel'? Ye comena to me first, I reckon!"

"She said, or implied at least, that she could not leave the child. But she cannot mean that!"

"And what for no? I hae nae need to mak' objections."

SALTED WITH FIRE

“But if she withdraw that one — as I hope soon to persuade her to do?”

“Then I should hae objections — mair nor ane — to put to the fore!”

“You surprise me! Is not a woman to leave father and mother, and cleave to her husband?”

“Ow, ay — sae be the woman is a wife! Than lat nane sun'er them! — But there's anither saying, sir, that I doobt may hae something to dee wi' Maggie's answer.”

“And what, pray, may that be?”

“That man or woman must leave father and mother, wife and child, for the sake o' the Son o' Man.”

“You surely are not papist enough to think that means that a minister is not to marry?”

“Not at all, sir; but I doobt that's what it'll come to wi' Maggie.”

“You mean that she will not marry?”

“I mean that she winna merry *you*, sir.”

“But just think how much more she would be able to do for Christ as the minister's wife!”

“I'm 'maist convinced she would coont mer-ryin' you tantamount to refusin' to lea' a' for the Son o' Man.”

“And why should she think that?”

“Because, sae far as I see, she canna think that *ye* hae left a' for *him*.”

“Ah, that is what you have been teaching

SALTED WITH FIRE

her! She does not say that of herself! You have not left her free to choose!"

"The question never cam' up atween's. But she's perfectly free to wyle her ain gait—and she kens she is. Ye dinna seem to think it possible she sud tak' *his* wull raither nor yours, —that the love o' Christ should constrain her ower and ayont the love o' Jeames Bletherwick! We hae conversed about ye, sir, but niver differed!"

"But allowing us—you and me—to be of different opinions on some points, must that be a reason why she and I should not love one another?"

"No reason whatever, sir—if ye can and do: *that* point would be already settled. But ye winna get Maggie to merry ye sae lang as she disna believe ye lo'e her Lord as weel as she lo'es him hersel'. It's no a common love that Maggie beirs to her Lord; and gien ye lo'ed her wi' a luv worthy o' her, ye would see that!"

"But at least ye will promise me not to interfere?"

"I'll promise ye naething, sir, excep' to do my duty by her,—sae far as I understan' what that duty is. Gien I thought—which the God o' my life forbid!—that Maggie didna lo'e him as I lo'e him—excep', as I houp, and am free to think, she lo'es him better nor I can yet—I

SALTED WITH FIRE

would gang upo' my auld knees till her, to entreat her to love him wi' a' her heart and sowl and stren'th and min'; an' whan I had done that, she micht merry wha she would, — hangman or minister: no a word would I say! For trouble she maun hae, and trouble she wull get — I thank my God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not!”

“Thén I am free to do my best to win her?”

“Ye are, sir; and mair, — afore the morn's mornin', I winna pass ae word wi' her upo' the subject.”

“Thank you, sir,” returned the minister, and took his leave.

“A fine lad! a fine lad!” said the soutar aloud to himself, as he resumed the work for a moment interrupted, “but no clear, — no crystal-clear, — no clear like the Son o' Man himsel'!”

He looked up, and saw his daughter in the doorway.

“No a word, lassie!” he cried. “I'm no for ye this meenute. No a word to me aboot onything or onybody the day — 'cep' it be absolute necessar'!”

“As ye wull, father,” rejoined Maggie. “I'm gaein' oot to seek auld Eppie; she was intill the baker's shop a meenute ago. The bairnie's asleep.”

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Vera weel! gien I hear him, I’s atten’ till him,” said the soutar.

“Thank ye, father!” she returned, and left the house.

But the minister, having to start that same afternoon for Deemouth, and feeling it impossible to preach at his ease, things remaining as they were, had been watching the soutar’s door, and saw it open and Maggie appear. For a moment he flattered himself she was coming to look for him, to say she was sorry for her behaviour to him. But her start when first she became aware of his presence did not fail, notwithstanding his conceit, to satisfy him that such was not her intent. He made haste to explain.

“I’ve been waiting all this time on the chance of seeing you, Margaret!” he said. “I am starting within an hour or so for Deemouth, and could not bear to go without first assuring you that your father has no objection to my saying what I please to you, only he means to have a talk with you to-morrow morning, and as I cannot possibly get back from Deemouth before Monday, I must express the hope now that he will not succeed in persuading you to doubt the reality of my love. I admire your father more than I can tell you, but he seems to hold the affections God has given us of small

SALTED WITH FIRE

account compared with his judgment concerning the strength and reality of them."

"Did he no say I was free to do what I liked?" rejoined Maggie, rather sharply.

"Yes; he did say something to that effect."

"Then, for mysel' and i' the name o' my father, I tell ye, Maister Bletherwick, I dinna care to see ye again—though I'm sure ye'll aye be welcome to my father, wha's taen a great anxiety about ye."

"Do you mean what you say, Margaret?" rejoined the minister, in a voice that betrayed not a little genuine emotion.

"I do mean it," she answered.

"If I tell you that I am both ready and willing to take the child, and bring him up as my own?"

"He wouldna *be* yer ain!"

"Quite as much as yours!"

"Hardly," she returned, with a curious little laugh. "But, as I daresay my father told you, I do not, I cannot believe that ye lo'e God wi' a' yer hert."

"But dare you say that for yourself, Margaret?"

"No; but I do want to love God as Jesus says we must love him. Besides, you have made it your professed business to teach people man's chief end, which is to love God like that.

SALTED WITH FIRE

Mr. Blatherwick, are ye a rael Christian, or are ye a hypocrite? I wad like to ken. But I hae nae richt to question ye, for I dinna believe ye ken yersel'!"

"Well, perhaps I do not. But I see there is no occasion to say more!"

"Na, nane," answered Maggie.

He lifted his hat, and turned away to the coach office. Maggie went to look for Eppie.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XI

IT would be difficult to represent the condition of mind in which Blatherwick sat on the box-seat of the Defiance coach that evening, behind four grey thoroughbreds carrying him at the rate of ten miles an hour toward Deemouth. Hurt pride, indignation, and a certain mild revenge in contemplating Maggie's disappointment when at length she should become aware of the distinction he had gained and she had lost, were its main components. He never noted a feature of the rather tame scenery that went hurrying by him, and yet the time did not seem to pass at all slowly: he was astonished when the coach stopped, and he found his journey at an end.

He descended from his seat rather cramped and stiff, and, as it was still early, started for a stroll about the streets to stretch himself, and see what was going on, glad he had not to preach in the morning, and would have a part of the day to go over his sermon again in that dreary memory of his. The streets were brilliant with gas, for Saturday was always a sort

SALTED WITH FIRE

of market-night there, and at that moment were crowded with girls going home, rollicking and merry, from a paper-mill at the close of a week's labour. To Blatherwick, who had very little sympathy with gladness of any sort, the sight only called up by contrast the very different scenes on which his eyes would look down the next evening from the vantage coigne of the pulpit, in a church filled with a respectable congregation, — to which he would be setting forth the results of certain late geographical discoveries and local identifications, not knowing that yet later discoveries had rendered everything he was about to say more than doubtful.

But as, while sunk in a not very profound reverie, he was turning the corner of a narrow wynd, he was all but knocked down by a girl whom another in the crowd had pushed violently against him. The former, recoiling from the impact, and unable to recover her equilibrium, fell helplessly prostrate on the granite pavement, and lay there motionless. Annoyed and half angry, he was on the point of walking on, heedless of the accident, when something in the pale face among the coarse and shapeless shoes that had already begun to gather thick around it, arrested him with a strong suggestion of some one he had once known. But the same moment

SALTED WITH FIRE

the crowd that stooped over her hid her from his view ; and, shocked to be reminded of Isy in such an assemblage, he turned resolutely away, and, seeking refuge in the many chances against its being she, walked steadily on. When he looked round again ere crossing the street, the crowd had vanished, and the pavement was all but empty. He spoke to a policeman who just then came up, but he had seen nothing of the occurrence, and remarked only that they were a rough lot of girls at the paper-mills.

A moment more and his mind was busy with a passage in his sermon which seemed about to escape his memory : it was still as impossible for him to talk freely about the things a minister is supposed to love best, as it had been when he began to preach. It was not, certainly, out of the fulness of the heart that *his* mouth ever spoke.

He went to the house of Mr. Robertson, the friend he had come to assist, had supper, retired early, and in the morning went to his friend's church. When the evening came, he climbed to the pulpit, and soon appeared engrossed in its rites. But while he seemed to be pouring out his soul in the long extempore prayer, he opened his eyes as if suddenly compelled, and that moment saw, in the front of the gallery before him, a face he could not doubt to be the face of

SALTED WITH FIRE

Isy. Her gaze was fixed upon him. He saw her shiver, and knew that she saw and knew him. He felt himself grow blind. His head swam, and it seemed as if some force bent his body down sideways from her. Such was his self-possession, however, that he went on with his prayer, if that could in any sense be prayer in which he knew neither word he uttered, thing he thought, nor feeling he felt. With the king in *Hamlet*, he might have said, —

“ My words fly up, my thoughts remain below :
Words without thoughts never to heaven go ! ”

But while yet speaking, and holding his eyes fast closed that he might not see her again, his consciousness all at once returned, — it seemed to him with a mighty effort of the will, and upon that he afterward prided himself. Thereupon he became aware of his thoughts and words, and was able to control his actions and speech. But all the while he “ conducted ” the rest of the “ service,” he was constantly aware of the figure of Isy before him with its gaze fixed motionless upon him, although he did not again look at her, until he began to wonder vaguely whether it might not be that she was dead, and come back only to his mind, — not from the grave, but from the quite as mysterious world of the memory, a thought-spectre. But at last he thought she

SALTED WITH FIRE

must indeed be alive, for when, at the close of the sermon, the people stood up to sing, she rose with them, and the half-unconscious preacher sat down exhausted with emotion, conflict, and with effort. When he rose again for the benediction, she was gone; and once more he took refuge in the doubt whether she had indeed been present.

When the lady of the house had retired, and James was sitting with his host over his one tumbler of toddy only to keep him company, for he never took whisky himself, there came a knock to the door. Mr. Robertson went to open it, and James's heart gave a despairing leap, as if to break from its prison. But in a few moments the host returned, saying it was a policeman who had knocked to let him know that a woman was lying drunk at the bottom of his doorsteps, and to inquire what he would have him do with her.

"I told him," said Mr. Robertson, "to take the poor creature to the station, and in the morning I would see if I could do anything for her. When they're ill the next day, you see," he added, "one may have a sort of chance with them; but it is seldom of any use."

A horrible suspicion that it was Isy herself had laid hold of Blatherwick; and for a moment he was in the mind to follow the men to

SALTED WITH FIRE

the station; but then his friend was sure to go with him, and what might not come of it! Seeing, however, that she had kept silent so long, she had probably lost all care about him, and if let alone would say nothing to trouble him. Thus he reasoned with himself against doing anything, shrinking from the very thought of looking the lost, disreputable creature in the eyes. Yet every now and then the old tenderness would come surging up in him, — to meet the awful consciousness that, if she had fallen into drunken habits and possibly worse, it was all his fault, and the ruin of the once lovely and lovable creature lay at his door and his alone.

He made haste to his room, and to bed, where for a long while he lay unable even to think. Then all at once, with gathered force, the frightful reality, the keen, bare truth, broke upon him like a huge, cold wave; he had a clear vision of his guilt, and the vision was conscious of itself as *his*; he saw it rounded in a grey fog of life-chilling dismay. What was he but a troth-breaker, a liar, — and that in strong fact, not in feeble tongue? “What art thou,” said Conscience, “but a cruel, self-seeking, loveless horror, — a contemptible sneak, who, in dread of missing the praises of men, had crept away unseen, and left the woman to bear alone their common sin!” What was he but a whited

SALTED WITH FIRE

sepulchre, full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness? — a fellow posing in the pulpit as an example to the faithful, who knew all the time that somewhere in the land lived a woman — once a loving, trusting woman — who could with a word hold him up to the world a hypocrite and a dastard, —

“ A fixed figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at ! ”

He sprang to the floor; the cold hand of an injured ghost seemed clutching feebly at his throat. But, in or out of bed, what could he do? Utterly helpless, he thought, but in truth not daring to look the question in the face, he crept back ignominiously, and, growing a little less uncomfortable, began to reason with himself that things were not so bad as they had for a moment seemed; that many another had failed in like fashion with him, but the fault was forgotten, and had never reappeared against him, — neither could any culprit be required to bear witness against himself. He must learn to discipline and repress his over-sensitiveness, otherwise it would one day seize him at a disadvantage, and betray him into exposing himself. Thus he reasoned, and sank back once more among the all but dead; the loud alarm of his rousing conscience ceased, and he fell

SALTED WITH FIRE

asleep in the resolve to get away from Deemouth the first thing in the morning, before Mr. Robertson should be awake.

Truly, it had been well for him to hold fast his repentant mood, but very few of his practical ideas, however much brooded over at night, lived to be a fruit in the morning; at this time in his life, indeed, he never embodied in action a single resolve that pointed in the direction of amendment. He could welcome the thought of a final release from sin and suffering at the dissolution of nature, but did his best to forget that at the very moment he was suffering because of sin for which he had never taken the least trouble to make the amends that were possible to him. He had lived for himself, to the destruction of one whom he once loved, and to the denial of his Lord and Master! More than twice on his way home he all but turned to go back to the police station, but it was, as usual, only *all but*, and he kept waiting on.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XII

BUT the yet early morning saw his friend Robertson on his way to do what he might for the redemption of one concerning whom he knew little or nothing. The policemen returning from their night's duty found him already at the door of the office, where he was at once admitted, for he was well known to most of them.

He found the poor woman miserably recovered from the effects of her dissipation. She was not merely ill and wretched, but looked so woe-begone that the heart of the good man, whose office in the economy of the world was healthful consolation, was immediately filled with the profoundest pity, recognising before him a creature whose hope was wasted to the verge of despair. She neither looked up nor spoke, but what he could see of her face appeared neither sullen nor vengeful. When he addressed her, she lifted her head a little, but not her eyes to his face, confessing apparently that she had and sought nothing to say for herself. He saw in her the signs of a despair on the point of taking refuge at the water-door out of life. Tenderly, as if to the little one he had left in bed with her mother,

SALTED WITH FIRE

he spoke in her scarce-listening ear child-soothing words of almost inarticulate sympathy, and his tone carried what it meant where his words were hardly intelligible. She lifted her lost eyes, and at sight of his face burst into tears.

“Na, na,” she cried, through tearing sobs, “ye canna help me, sir! There’s naething ’at you or onybody can dee for me! But I’m near the mou’ o’ the pit, and God be thankit, I’ll be ower the rim o’ ’t or I hae grutten my last greit oot! For God’s sake, gie me a drink — a drink o’ onything!”

“I daurna gie ye onything strang,” answered the minister, who could scarcely speak for a swelling in his throat. “What ye want is a cup o’ nice het tay! There’s a cab waitin’ me at the door; get ye up, my puir bairn, and come hame wi’ me. My wife ’ll be doon afore we win back, an’ she ’ll hae a cup o’ tay ready for ye in ae minute! You and me ’ill hae oor breakfast thegither.”

“Ken ye what ye ’re sayin’, sir? I daurna luik honest wuman i’ the face. I’m sic as ye ken naething aboot!”

“I ken a heap aboot fowk o’ a’ kinds, — mair, a heap, nor ye ken yersel’, I’m thinking! I ken mair about you nor ye think, for I hae seen ye i’ my ain kirk mair nor ance or twice. I was preachin’ straucht intill yer bonny face, and saw

SALTED WITH FIRE

ye greitin', and maist grat mysel'. Come awa' hame wi' me, my dear; my wife's ane jist like mysel', an' 'll turn naething but the smilin' side o' her face to ye, I s' promise ye. She's no an ill wuman, I can assure ye — nor luiks like it. Come awa'!"

She rose.

"Eh, but I would like to luik ance mair i' the face o' a bonny, clean wuman! I'll gang, sir — only, I pray ye, mak' speed and tak' me oot o' the sicht o' fowk!"

"Ay, ay, com' awa'; we'll hae ye oot o' this in a moment," answered Mr. Robertson. — "Put the fine doon to me," he whispered to the inspector, as they passed him on their way out. The man merely returned his nod, and took no further notice of the woman.

"I thought that was what would come o't!" he murmured to himself as he looked after them with a smile.

But indeed he knew little of what would come of it!

The good minister whose heart was the teacher of his head, and who was not ashamed either of himself or his companion, showed Isy into their little breakfast-parlour, and ran up the stair to his wife. Hurriedly he told her that he had brought the woman home, and wanted her judgment upon her. Mrs. Robertson hurried

SALTED WITH FIRE

her toilet, left her child to the care of her one servant, and made haste to welcome the poor shivering bird of the night, waiting with ruffled feathers below. She opened the door, and stood silent on the threshold while the two made the acquaintance of each other's eyes. Then the wanderer fled to the wide-opened arms, but, failing, fell on the floor. Instantly the other was down by her side. Her husband came, and between them they laid her on the little couch.

"Shall I get the brandy?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"Try a cup of tea first," he answered. "If she does not come to at once, I will run for the doctor."

Mrs. Robertson made haste, and soon had the tea poured out and cooling. But Isy still lay motionless. Then her hostess, kneeling by the sofa, raised the helpless head upon her arm, and, putting a spoonful of tea to her lips, found to her joy that she tried to swallow it. The next minute she opened her eyes and would have risen, but the rescuing hand held her down.

"I want to tell ye!" moaned Isy, with feeble expostulation: "ye dinna ken wha ye hae taen intill yer hoose! Lat me up to get my breath, or I winna be able to tell ye."

"Drink the tea," answered the other, "and then you shall say what you like. Only you

SALTED WITH FIRE

need n't try to say much: there will be time enough afterwards for everything."

The poor girl opened her eyes wide, and gazed for a moment at Mrs. Robertson. Then she took the cup and drank the tea. Her new friend went on:—

"You must just be content to bide where you are for a day or two. And ye're no to fash yer-sel' about onything. I have clothes enough to give you all the change you want. Hold your tongue, please, and finish your tea."

"Eh, mem," cried Isy, "fowk 'll say ill o' ye, gien they see the like o' me i' the hoose!"

"Lat them say, and say 't again! What's fowk but muckle geese?"

"But there's the minister and his character!" she persisted.

"Hoots! what cares the minister?" said his wife. "Speir at him there what he thinks o' clash."

"'Deed," he answered, "I never heeded it eneuch to tell. There's but ae word I heed, and that's my Maister's!"

"Eh, but ye canna lift me oot o' the pit!"

"God helpin', I can," returned the minister. "But ye're no i' the pit yet by a lang road; and oot o' the road till't I s' hae ye, please God, afore anither nicht has darkent and anither mornin' dawed!"

SALTED WITH FIRE

“ I dinna ken what 's to come o' me ! ”

“ What 's to come o' ye we 'll soon see !
Brakfast 's yer business the noo ; and efter that
my wife an' me 'll sit in jeedgment upo' ye.
Ye 'll say what ye please, and neither ill fowk
nor unco guid sall come nigh ye.”

A pitiful smile flitted across the face of Isy,
with the almost babyish look that used to form
part of her charm. Then, like an obedient child,
she set herself to eat and drink what she could.
When she had evidently done her best, —

“ Now put up your feet again on the sofa, and
tell us everything,” said the minister.

“ No,” returned Isy, “ I 'm not at liberty to
tell you *everything*.”

“ Then tell us what you please — so long as
it 's true,” he rejoined.

“ I will, sir,” she replied.

She was silent for a moment, as if thinking
how to begin ; then, after a gasp or two, said, —

“ I 'm not a good woman. Perhaps I am
worse than you think me. Oh, my baby ! my
baby ! ” she cried, and burst into tears.

“ There 's nae that mony o' 's just what ither
fowk think us,” said the minister's wife.
“ We 're in general baith better and waur nor
that. But tell me ae thing, — what took ye,
last nicht, straucht frae the kirk to the public ?
The twa haudna weel thegither ! ”

SALTED WITH FIRE

“It was this, ma’am,” she replied, reassuming the more refined speech to which she had latterly been less accustomed; “I had a dreadful shock that night from suddenly seeing some one in the church I had not thought ever to see again. And when I got out into the street, I turned so sick that somebody gave me whisky, and I disgraced myself. Indeed I am greatly ashamed of it, ma’am; but I have a much worse trouble upon me than that, — one you would hardly believe!”

“I understand,” said Mrs. Robertson, modifying her speech the moment she perceived the change in that of her guest. “You saw him in the church, — the man that got you into trouble! I thought that must be it! Tell me about him!”

“I will not tell his name. I was the most in fault, for I knew better. I would rather die than do him any more mischief! — Good-morning, ma’am! — I thank you kindly, sir! Believe me, I am not ungrateful, whatever else I may be that is bad.”

She rose as she spoke; but Mrs. Robertson got to the door first, and, standing between her and it, confronted her with a smile.

“Don’t think I blame you for holding your tongue, my dear. I believe, if I were in the same case — or, at least, I hope that if I were,

SALTED WITH FIRE

hot pincers would n't draw his name out of me. What right has every vulgar inquisitive woman to know the secret gnawing at your heart like a live serpent? I will never ask you anything about him. — There! you have my promise! Now sit down again, and don't be afraid. Tell me what you like, and not a word more. The minister is sure to comfort you."

"What can anybody do to comfort such as me! I am lost — lost out of sight! Nothing can save me! The Saviour himself would n't open the door to a woman that left her sucking child out in the dark night! — That's what I did!" she cried, ending with a wail as from a heart whose wound eternal years could not close.

Growing a little calmer, —

"I would not have you think, ma'am," she resumed, "that I was careless of what might happen to the darling. But my wits went all of a sudden, and a terror came upon me. Could it have been the hunger, do you think? I laid him down in the heather, and ran from him. How far I went I do not know. But all at once I came to myself, and knew what I had done, and ran to take him up again. But whether I lost my way back, or what I did, I cannot tell, only I could not find him! Then for a while I must have been clean out of my

SALTED WITH FIRE

mind; I was always thinking I saw him torn by the foxes, and the corbies picking out his eyes. Even now, at night, I cannot get things like that out of my head! It was that drove me to the drink for a while. If only I could keep from seeing them when I'm falling asleep!"

She gave a smothered scream, and hid her face in her hands. Mrs. Robertson, weeping herself, sought to comfort her, but it seemed in vain.

"The worst o' 't is," Isy resumed, "— for I maun confess a' thing, mem!— is that I canna tell what I may hae done i' the drink. I may even hae tellt his name, though I min' naething about it! It maun be months sin' I tastit a drap; but I'm no fit that he should ever cast a luik at me again! My hert's jist like to brak when I think I may hae been fause to him, as weel as fause to my bairn, as I hae been to Him that said to the greitin' sinner, Gang yer wa's and dinna dee 't again. — Eh, but wasna that bonny o' him? And there's me has gane and dune 't again, ever sae aften — I mean the drink, mem! — Gien the deils wud but come and rive me, I would say to them, Thank ye, sirs, ilka bit they tore oot o' me!"

"My dear," said the voice of the parson, from where he sat listening to every word she uttered, — "my dear, there's never deil sall come nigh you or the wee dowie ye hae lost sicht o' for a

SALTED WITH FIRE

time; naething but the han' o' the Son o' Man 'll come upon ye, saft-strokin' yer hert, and closin' up the terrible gash intill 't. I' the name o' God, I tell ye, dautie, the day 'ill come whan ye 'll smile i' the vera face o' the Lord himsel' at thought o' what he has broucht ye throw! Lord Christ, keep a guid grup o' thy puir bairn, and gie her back her ain. Thy wull be done! and that wull 's a' for redemption! — Gang on wi' yer tale, my lassie."

"'Deed, sir, I can say nae mair — and hae nae mair to say; I 'm some — some sick-like!"

She fell back on the sofa, white as death.

The parson was a big man; he took her bodily in his arms, and carried her to a room they had always ready, on the chance of a visit from "one of the least of these."

At the top of the stair stood their little daughter, a child of five or six, wanting to go down to her mother, and wondering why she was not permitted.

"Who is it, moder?" she whispered, as Mrs. Robertson passed her, following her husband and Isy. "Is she very dead?"

"No, darling," answered the mother; "it is an angel that has lost her way, and is tired — so tired! You must be very quiet, and not disturb her. Her head is going to ache very much."

SALTED WITH FIRE

The child turned and went down the stair, step by step, softly, saying, —

“I will tell my rabbit not to make any noise—only to be as white as he can.”

Once more they succeeded in bringing back to the light of consciousness her beclouded spirit. She woke in a soft white bed, with two faces of compassion bending over her, closed her eyes again with a smile of sweet content, and was soon wrapt in a wholesome slumber.

In the meantime the caitiff minister had reached his manse, and found a ghastly loneliness awaiting him, — oh, how much deeper than that of the woman he had forsaken! She had lost her repute and her baby; he had lost his God; the vision was shut up in the unfathomable abysses of thought, outside and far away from his consciousness. The signs of God were around him in the Book, around him in the world, around him in his own existence, — but the signs only. God did not speak to him, did not manifest himself; he was not where James Blatherwick sought him; he was not in any place where he would ever look for or find him!

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XIII

IT must be remembered that Blatherwick knew nothing of the existence of his child: such knowledge might have modified the half-conscious satisfaction with which, on his way home, he now and then saw a providence in the fact that he had been preserved from marrying a woman who proved capable of disgracing him in the very streets: what then would have become of him? During his slow journey of forty miles, most of which he made on foot, eager after bodily motion, again, as in the night, he had to pass through many an alternation of thought and feeling and purpose. To and fro in him, up and down, this way and that, went the changing currents of self-judgment, of self-consolation and dread — never clear, never determined, never set straight for honesty. He must line up — not to the law of righteousness, but to the show of what a minister ought to be; he must appear unto men! In a word, he must keep up the deception he had begun in childhood, and had until of late years practised unknowingly. Now he knew it, but not how

SALTED WITH FIRE

to get rid of it. In fact, he only sought how to conceal it. He had no pleasure in the deception; he had a conscious misery in not being what he seemed, in being compelled, as he fancied himself in excuse, to look like one that had not sinned. He grumbled in his heart that God should have forsaken him so far as to allow him to disgrace himself before his own conscience. He did not yet see that he was ingrainedly dark; that the Ethiopian could change his skin, or the leopard his spots as soon as he; that he had never yet looked purity in the face; that the fall which disgraced him in his own eyes was but the necessary outcome of his character — that it was no accident, but an unavoidable result; that his true nature had but appeared, as everything hid must be known, and everything covered revealed. Even to begin the purification without which his moral and spiritual being must perish eternally, he must dare to look on himself as he was; there were others who saw him as he was; but he shrank from recognising himself, and thought he lay hid from all. Dante describes certain of the redeemed as lying hid in their own cocoon of light, but James lay hidden like the insect in its own *gowk-spittle*. It is strange, but so it is, that many a man never sees himself until he becomes aware of the eyes of other men fixed

SALTED WITH FIRE

upon him; they seeing him, and he knowing that they see him, then first, even to himself, will he confess what he may have long all but known. Blatherwick's hour was on its way, slow in coming, but not to be avoided. His soul was ripening to self-declaration. The ugly flower must blossom, must show itself as the flower of that evil thing he counted himself. What a hold has not God upon us, in this inevitable ripening of the unseen into the visible and present! The flower is there and must appear. In the meantime he suffered, and walked on in silence, walking like a servant of the Ancient of Days, but knowing himself a whited sepulchre. Within him he felt the dead body that could not rest until it was laid bare to the sun; but all the time he comforted himself that he had not fallen a second time, and that the *once* would not be remembered against him: did not the fact that it was forgotten, most likely indeed was never known, indicate that he was forgiven of God? And so, unrepentant, he remained unforgiven, for he remained the servant of sin.

But the hideous thing was not altogether concealed; something showed under the covering whiteness! His mother saw the shapeless something that haunted him, and shrank from conjecturing what it might be, though often

SALTED WITH FIRE

she asked herself what was amiss with him, and why the fashion of his countenance seemed so changed when next she saw him. His father, too, felt that he had gone from him utterly; that all his son's feeding of the flock had done nothing to bring his parents and him nearer to each other! What could be lying hidden beneath the mask of that unsmiling face?

But there was one who could see a little deeper than either of the parents. One day, after the interval of a fortnight, the minister walked into the workshop of the soutar, and found him there as usual, his hands working away diligently, and his thoughts brooding over the blessed fact, that God is not the God of the perfect only, but of the growing as well; not the God of the righteous only, but of those also who hunger and thirst after righteousness:

"God blaw on the smoking flax and tie up the bruised reed!" he was saying to himself aloud when in walked the minister.

Now, as in other mystical natures, a something had been developed in the soutar very like the spirit of prophecy — an insight, that is, which, seemingly without exercise of the will, in a measure laid bare to him the thoughts and intents of some heart in whom he was deeply interested; or perhaps it was rather a faculty, working unconsciously, of putting to-

SALTED WITH FIRE

gether outward signs, and drawing from them an instantaneous conclusion as to the single fact at which they all pointed, the thing, that is, which would explain them all. After the first greeting, when he had but glanced up from the old shoe he was cobbling, he looked up with a certain sudden fixing of his attention upon his visitor, for the mere glance had shown him that he looked ill, and perceived that something in the man's heart was eating at it like a canker; and with that the question rose in his brain — could he be the father of the little one crowing in the next room? The same moment he shut the question into the darkest closet of his mind, for he shrank from the secret of another soul, as from lifting a corner of the veil that hid the Holy of Holies! But what, he thought again, if the man stood in need of the offices of a friend? It was one thing to pry into a man's secret; another, to help him to escape from it! As out of this thought he sat looking at him for a moment, the minister felt the hot blood rush to his cheeks.

“Ye dinna luik that weel, minister,” said the soutar; “is there onything the matter wi’ ye, sir?”

“Nothing worth mentioning,” answered the parson. “I have sometimes a touch of headache in the early morning, especially when I

SALTED WITH FIRE

have sat later than usual over my books the night before, but it always goes off during the day."

"Ow weel, sir, that's no, as ye say, a vera sarious thing! I couldna help fancyin' ye had something on yer min' by ord'nar!"

"Naething, naething," rejoined the minister, with a feeble laugh. "— But," he went on — and something seemed to send the words to his lips without giving him time to think — "it is curious you should say that, for I was just thinking what was the real intent of the Apostle in his injunction to confess our faults to one another."

The moment he uttered the words, he felt as if he had proclaimed his secret on the house-top, and began the sentence afresh, with the notion of correcting it; but again he felt the hot blood shooting to his face. "I must go on with something," he felt rather than said to himself, "or those sharp eyes will see through and through me!"

"It came into my mind," he went on, "that I should like to know what *you* thought about the passage; it cannot surely give any ground for auricular confession! I understand perfectly how a man may want to consult a friend in any difficulty — and that friend naturally the minister; but —"

SALTED WITH FIRE

This was by no means a thing he had meant to say, but he seemed carried on to say he knew not what. It was as if, without his will, the will of God was driving the man to the brink of a pure confession — to the cleansing of his stuffed bosom from “that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart.”

“Do you think, for instance,” he went on, thus driven, “that a man is bound to tell everything — even to the friend he loves best?”

“I think,” answered the soutar after a moment’s thought, “that we must answer the *what*, before we enter upon the *how much*. And I think, first of all, we must ask — to whom are we bound to confess? — and there surely the answer is, to him to whom we have done the wrong. If we have been grumbling in our hearts, it is to God we must confess; who else has to do with the matter? To *Him* we maun flee the moment our eyes are opened to what we’ve been doin’! But, gien we hae wranged ane o’ oor fellow-cratur, wha are we to gang till wi’ oor confession but that same? It seems to me we maun gang to that man first — even afore we gang to God himsel’, excep’ it be wi’ a cry for stren’th as we gang. And not one moment must we indulge procrastination on the plea o’ prayin’! From our knees we maun rise in haste, to say to brother or sister,

SALTED WITH FIRE

‘I’ve done ye this or that wrong: forgi’e me. God can wait for your prayer better than you, or him that ye’ve wranged, can wait for your confession! After that ye maun at ance fa’ to your best endeavour to mak’ up for the wrang. ‘Confess your sins,’ I think it means, ‘each o’ ye to the ither against whom is the offence.’ Dinna ye think that ’s the common-sense o’ the thing?”

“Indeed, I think you must be right!” replied the minister, who sat summoning resolution to cover his retreat as well as he could. “I will go home and think it over. Indeed, I am already all but convinced that must be what the Apostle intended.”

With a great sigh, of which he was not aware, Blatherwick rose and walked from the kitchen, hoping he looked not guilty, but sunk in thought. In truth, however, he was unable to think. Oppressed and heavy-laden with the sense of a duty too unpleasant for his performance, he went home to his cheerless manse, where his housekeeper was the only person to speak to, a woman nearly incapable of comforting anybody. He went straight to his study, and there kneeling, found he could not pray the simplest prayer; he could not pray without words, and not a word would come! For the time he was dead, and in hell — so far perished

SALTED WITH FIRE

that he felt nothing. He rose, and sought the open air, but it brought him no restoration. He had not heeded his friend's advice, had not even contemplated the one thing possible to him, had not moved, even in spirit, toward Isy! The only comfort of his guilty soul was the thought that he could at present do nothing, for he did not know where Isy was to be found. When he remembered the next moment that his friend Robertson must be able to find her, he soothed his conscience with the reflection that there was no coach till the next morning! In the meantime he could write: a letter would reach him almost as soon as he could himself! But what would Robertson think? He might give his wife the letter to read! She might read it herself, for they concealed nothing from each other! So he only walked the faster, tired himself, and earned an appetite: that was his day's work! He ate a good dinner, although without much enjoyment, and, after it, fell fast asleep in his chair. No letter was written that day. No letter of such sort was ever written. The spirit was not willing, and the flesh was weakness itself.

In the evening he took up a learned commentary on the Book of Job; but he never even approached the discovery of what Job wanted, received, and was satisfied withal. He never

SALTED WITH FIRE

saw that what he himself needed, but did not desire, was the same thing — even a sight of God! He never perceived that when God came to Job, Job forgot all he intended to say to him — had not a question to ask him — knew that all was well. The student could not see that the very presence of the Father of men sufficed to answer every doubt! But then James's heart was not pure like Job's, and he could not see God; he did not even desire to see him, therefore could see nothing as it was. He read with the devil beside him, and the hurt of his presence in his heart.

He was like the Mephistopheles of Marlowe's *Faust*. The student, in his conversation with the demon, asks him, —

“How comes it, then, that thou art out of hell?”

And Mephistopheles answers him, —

“Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.”

And again, —

“Where we are is hell;
And where hell is there must we ever be.
. . . . When all the world dissolves,
And every creature shall be purified,
All places shall be hell that are not heaven.”

And yet again, —

“I tell thee I am damned, and now in hell.”

SALTED WITH FIRE

And as James sat thus miserable, or lay sleepless, or walked in his death about the room, his father and mother, some three miles or so away, were talking about him in bed.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XIV

FOR some time they had lain silent, thinking and thinking about him by no means happily. They were thinking how little had been their satisfaction in their minister-son; and both had gone back in their minds to a certain time, long before, when they had conferred together about him while he was but a boy at school.

The heart of the mother had even then begun to resent his coldness, his seeming unconsciousness of his parents as having any share or interest in his life or prospects. Scotch parents are seldom demonstrative to each other or to their children; but in them, too, possibly even the hotter because of their outward coldness, burns the causal fire — the first, the central, the deepest in their being; for it is that eternal fire which keeps the world from turning to a frozen clod: the love of parents must burn while the Father lives; it must burn until the universe is the Father and his children, and none beside. That fire, when held down and crushed together by the weight of unkindled fuel, will gather heat, and gathering glow, until it break forth in

SALTED WITH FIRE

the scorching and wounding flames of a righteous indignation. But for the present this worthy pair endured, and were still. Their son was always hidden from them by an impervious moral hedge; he never came out from behind it, never stood clear before them; and they were unable to break through to him. There was no angelic traitor within his citadel of indifference to draw back the bolts of its iron gates and let them in. They had gone on hoping, and hoping in vain, for some holy, lovely change in him; but at last confessed it a relief when he left the house and went to Edinburgh.

The children were in bed and asleep, and the parents lay as now, sleepless.

“Hoo’s Jamie been gettin’ on the day?” his father had said.

“Well enough, I suppose,” answered his mother, who did not then speak Scotch quite so broad as her husband’s, although a good deal broader than her mother, the wife of a country doctor, would have permitted when she was a child; “he’s always busy at his books. He’s a good boy, and a diligent; there’s no gainsayin’ that! But as to kennin’ hoo he’s gettin’ on, I can beir no testimony. He never lets a word go from him as to what he’s aboot, ae way or anither. ‘What can he be thinkin’ about?’ I whiles say to mysel’—sometimes ower and ower again i’

SALTED WITH FIRE

the day. When I go into the parlour, where he always sits till he has done his lessons, he never lifts his heid to show that he hears me, or cares who's there or who is n't. And as soon as he's leart them, he takes a book and goes up till his room, or oot about the hoose or the cornyard, or intill the barn, and never comes near me! I sometimes won'er gien ever he would miss me deid!" she ended, with a great sigh.

"Hoot awa', woman! dinna tak' on like that about it," returned her husband. "The laddie's like the lave of laddies! They're a' just like pup-doggies till their een comes open, and they ken them 'at broucht them here. He canna mak' a guid man, as he wull, and no learn in time to be a guid son to her 'at bore him! Ye canna say 'at ever he contert ye! Ye hae tellt me that a hunner times!"

"I have that! But I would hae had no occasion to dwell upo' that fac', gien he had gi'en me, jist noo and than, a wee bit sign o' ony affection!"

"Ay, doobtless! but the signs are no' the thing. The affection, as ye ca' 't, may be there, and the signs o' 't wantin'!— But I ken weel hoo the hert o' ye 's workin', my ain auld dautie!" he went on, anxious to comfort her who was dearer to him than son or daughter. "I dinna think it wad dee for me to say onything till him

SALTED WITH FIRE

about his behaviour to ye; it micht only mak' things waur; for he wouldna ken what I was aimin' at! I dinna believe he has a notion o' onything amiss in him, and I fear he would only think I was hard upon him, and no fair. Ye see, gien a thing disna come oot o' 'tsel', no cryin' upo' 't'll gar 't lift its heid frae the deeps — sae lang, at least, as a man himsel' kens naething about its vera existence."

"I don't doubt you're right, Peter," answered his wife; "I know well that scolding will never make love spread out his wings — except it be to fly away. Naething but fleein' can come o' flytin'!"

"Maybe it micht be waur nor that!" rejoined Peter: "flytin' may drive Love clean oot o' sicht i' the droonin' deeps! But we better gang till oor sleeps, lass! We hae ane anither, whatever comes!"

"That's true, Peter; but aye the mair I hae you, the mair I want my Jamie!" cried the mother.

The father said no more, but, rising after a while, stole softly into his son's room. His wife followed him, and found her husband on his knees by the bedside, his face buried in his boy's blankets; while, with calm, dreamless countenance, James lay asleep, nor knew a jot of the trouble of his parents. Had he been able to look

SALTED WITH FIRE

into their hearts, he would have understood nothing of what went on in them — would have seen no glow of the fire that made God able to create.

Marion took her husband's hand and led him back to bed.

“ To think,” she said as they went, “ 'at he's the same bairnie I glowert at till my soul ran oot at my e'en; and I leuch and grat, baith at ance, to think I was the mother o' a man, and kenned what was i' the hert o' Mary hersel' when she claspit the blessed ane to her bosom! ”

“ May that same bairnie, born for oor remeid, save the man afore he's ower auld to repent! ” responded the father in a broken voice.

“ For what,” moaned Marion, “ was the hert o' a mother gien me? What was I made a woman for, whase life is for the beirin' o' bairns to the great Father o' a', gien this same was to be my reward? Na, na, Lord,” she went on, interrupting and correcting herself, “ I claim naething but thy wull; and ye wouldna, sure, hae me think that siclike was thy wull, for I wouldna believe 't gien an angel frae h'aven was to declare 't to me na, no gien the Bible itsel' were to haud it oot to my e'en i' the plainst o' muckle print! ”

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XV

IT would be too much to say that the hearts of his parents took no pleasure in the advancement of their son, such as it was. I suspect the mother was glad to be yet proud where she could find no happiness — proud in the love that lay incorruptible in her being. But the love that is all on one side, though it may be stronger than death, can hardly be so strong as life! A poor, maimed, one-winged thing, it cannot soar into any region of bliss — conscious bliss, I mean, while indeed it soars into that very region where God himself dwells, and there partakes of the divine sorrow which his heartless children cause him — partakes also of the eternal bliss that love is in herself, even while all response is still denied her. But my reader may well believe that father nor mother dwelt much upon what their neighbours called James's success — much less cared to talk about it with them; they would have felt it but hypocrisy, so long as hearty and genuine relations were so much worse than imperfect between them. Never to human being, save the one to the other, and that now but very seldom,

SALTED WITH FIRE

did they allude to the bitterness which their hearts knew ; that would have seemed equivalent to disowning their son. And the daughter was gone to whom the mother had once been able to bemoan herself, because she understood and shared in their trouble ! Isobel's heart had echoed every involuntary sigh that burst from the heart of her mother, loaded with its emptiness ; for she too loved her brother, and would gladly have laid down her life to kindle in his heart such a love as hers to their parents.

My reader may now understand a little what sort of a man the lad James Blatherwick had grown into. He left Stonecross for the University with scarce a backward look, with nothing in his heart but eagerness for the coming conflict. Having there gained one of the highest bursaries, he donned his red gown with never a thought for the son of the poor widow who had competed along with him, and who, in consequence of his failure, had to leave his ambition behind him and go into a shop — where, however, he soon became able to keep, and did keep, his mother in what, to her, was nothing less than luxury, while the successful competitor — well, so far my reader already knows !

When James returned home for the vacations, things showed themselves unaltered, between him and his parents ; and by his third return the

SALTED WITH FIRE

heart of his sister had ceased to beat at all faster when the hour of his arrival drew near. For she knew that he would but shake hands with her limply, let her hand drop, and in a moment be set down to read. Before the time for him to take his degree arrived, she was gone to the great Father, and James never missed or bemoaned her. He left that all to his mother. To her he was never anything more or less than quite civil, while she, on her part, never asked him to do anything for her. He came and went as he pleased, cared for nothing done on the farm or about the house, and seemed in his own thoughts, and in his studies, the ardour of which had shown no sign of intermission, to have enough to occupy him. He had grown up a powerful as well as a handsome youth, and had dropped almost every sign of his country breeding, hardly ever deigned a word in his original mother-dialect, but spoke good English with a Scotch accent, nor had any of the abominable affectations cultivated by not a few of such as sought to repudiate their vernacular.

His father had not to discover that he was far too fine a gentleman to show any interest in agriculture, or put out his hand to take the least share in the oldest and most dignified of callings. His mother continued to look forward, although with fading interest, to the time

SALTED WITH FIRE

when he should be the messenger of a gospel which he nowise at present understood; but his father did not at all share this anticipation; and his mother soon came to know that to hear him preach would but renew and intensify the misery to which she had become a little accustomed in their ordinary intercourse. The father felt that his boy had either left him a long way off, or had never come near him any time. He seemed to see him afar upon some mountain-top of conscious or imagined superiority. James, as one having no choice, lived at what custom and use called *home*, but behaved as if come of another breed than his parents, a breed that had with theirs but few appreciable points of contact. One of the most conventional of youths, he yet wrote verses in secret, and worshipped Byron in his hidden closet. What he wrote he seldom showed, and then only to the one or two whom he thought fit to appreciate its formal excellence. Perhaps he wrote only with the object of proving to himself that he could do that also, and in so far probably succeeded, for the one thing he never doubted was his general faculty. When he went to Edinburgh to learn theology, forsooth, he was an accomplished mathematician and a yet better classic, with some predilections for science, and a very small knowledge of the same. His books showed for the two former,

SALTED WITH FIRE

and for the latter, an occasional attempt to set his father right in some point of chemistry. His aspirations were first, to show himself a gentleman in matters under the jurisdiction of that bubblehead of the community calling itself Society — of which in fact he knew nothing; and next, to have his eloquence recognised by the public, although at present it existed only in an imagination informed by ambition. These were the two devils, or rather the two forms of the one devil, Vanity, that possessed him. Hence, although in part unconsciously, he looked down on his parents, and on the whole circumstance of his present existence, as unworthy because old-fashioned, and countrified, concerned only with God's earth and God's animals, and having nothing to do with the shows of life. And yet to the worthiest of those who could have claimed social distinction, the ways of life in the house of his parents would, contrasted with their son's views of life, have seemed altogether admirable. To such, the homely, simple, not quite unfastidious modes and conditions of the unassuming homestead, would have appeared not a little attractive. But James took little interest in any of them, and none at all in the ways of the humble people, tradesmen or craftsmen, of the neighbouring village. He never felt the common humanity

SALTED WITH FIRE

that made him one with them, and did not in his thoughts associate with them. Had he turned his feeling into thinking and then into words, he would have said, "I cannot help being the son of a farmer, but at least my mother's father was a doctor; and had I been consulted, my father should have been at least an officer in one of his majesty's services, naval or military, and my mother the daughter of such an officer!" The root of his folly lay in the groundless self-esteem of the fellow, fostered, I think, by a certain literature which fed the notion, if indeed it did not plainly inculcate it as a duty, of rising in the world — of gaining that praise of men which seems to so many the patent of nobility, but which the man whom we call *The Saviour*, and who professed to know the secret of Life, warned his followers they must not seek, if they would be the children of the Father who claimed them as his. Its books taught the pursuit of knowledge, the saving of money, and the acquisition of influence — not the doing of one's duty in whatever condition he found himself, as the only way to become such as God intended us to be.

I have said enough, perhaps too much, of this most uninteresting of men! How he came to be born such, is not for my speculation; had he remained such, his story would not have been

SALTED WITH FIRE

writing; how he became something better it is now my task to try to tell.

I have been led to the foregoing remarks on the minister's past by my episode of the talk of his parents as they lay in bed on one occasion, recalling an incident of their experience concerning the boy: I now return to the talk that followed that conversation.

They had again lain silent for a while, but at length broke words from their silence: —

“I was jist thinkin', Peter,” said Marion, “o' the last time we spak' thegither about the laddie — it maun be nigh sax year sin syne, I'm thinkin'.”

“'Deed ye may be richt, Mirran,” replied her spouse. “It's no sic a cheery subjec' 'at we should hae muckle to say to ane anither anent it! He's a man noo, an' weel luikit upo', but, eh, it mak's unco little differ to his parents! He's jist as dour as ever, and as far as man could weel be frae them he cam' o'! — never a word to the ane or the ither o' 's! Gien we war twa dowgs, he couldna hae less to say till 's, but nicht weel hae mair! I's warran' Frostie says mair in ae half-hoor to his tyke, nor Jamie has said to you or me sin' first he gaed to the college!”

“Bairns is whiles a queer kin' o' a blessin'!” remarked the mother. “But, eh, Peter! it's

SALTED WITH FIRE

what may lie ahint the silence that frichts me!”

“Lass, ye ’re frichtin’ *me!* What div ye mean?”

“Ow naething!” returned Marion, bursting into tears. “But it was a’ at ance borne in upo’ me, that there maun be something to accoont for the thing. At the same time I daurna speir at God himsel’ what that thing micht be. For there’s something waur noo, and has been for some time, than ever there was afore! He has sic a luik, as gien he saw nor heard naething but ae thing, and that ae thing keepit on inside him, and wouldna wheesht. It’s an awfu’ thing to say o’ a mither’s ain laddie; and to hae said it only to my ain man, and the father o’ the laddie, mak’s my hert like to brak! — It’s as gien I had been fause to my ain flesh and blude but to think it o’ him! Eh, Peter, what *can* it be!”

“Ou jist maybe naething at a’. Maybe he’s in love, and the lass winna hear till him!”

“Na, Peter; love gars a man luik up, no doon at his ain feet! It gars him fling his heid back, and luik oot afore him — no in at his ain inside! It mak’s a man straucht i’ the back, strong i’ the airm, and bauld i’ the hert. — Didna it you, Peter?”

“Maybe it did; I dinna min’ vera weel. But I see it can hardly be love wi’ the lad. Still, even his paurants maun tak’ tent o’ jeedgin’ —

SALTED WITH FIRE

pecially ane o' the Lord's ministers — maybe ane o' the Lord's elec'!"

"It's awfu' to think — I daurna say 't — I daurna maist think the words o' 't, Peter, but it *will* cry oot i' my vera hert! — Steik the door, Peter — and ticht, that no a stray stirk may hear me! — Was a minister o' the gospel ever a heepocrite, Peter? — like ane o' the auld scribes and Pharisees, Peter? — Wadna it be ower terrible, Peter, to be permittit? — Gien our ain only son was —"

But here she broke down; she could not finish the frightful sentence. The farmer left his bed, and sat on a chair by the side of it. The next moment he sank on his knees, and, hiding his face in his hands, groaned, as from a thicket of torture, —

"God in h'aven, hae mercy upo' the hail lot o' us."

Then he went as if unconscious of what he did, wandering from the room, down to the kitchen, and out to the barn on his bare feet, closing the door of the house behind him. In the barn he threw himself face downward on a heap of loose straw, and there lay motionless, while his wife wept alone in her bed and hardly missed her husband. It required, indeed, no reflection on her part to understand where he had gone, and what he did: he was crying like Lear, in

SALTED WITH FIRE

the bitterness of his wounded heart, to the Father of fathers.

“God, ye’re a father yersel’,” he groaned from the deepest, silentest nook of his soul, “and sae ye ken hoo it’s rivin’ at my hert! — Na, Lord, ye dinna ken; for ye never had a doobt about *your* son! — Na, I’m no blamin’ Jamie, Lord; for ye ken weel I ken naething at a’ about him; he never opened the buik o’ his hert to *me!* Oh, God, grant that he hae naething to hide; but gien he has, Lord, pluck him oot o’ the glaur, and latna him stick there. I kenna hoo to shape my petition, for I’m a’ i’ the dark; but deliver him some gait, Lord, I pray thee, for his mither’s sake! — ye ken what she is! — *I* dinna coont for onything, but ye ken *her!* — she’s ane o’ the subjek’s o’ yer ain kingdom! — Lord, deliver the hert o’ her frae the awfu’est o’ a’ her fears. — Lord, a hypocrite! a Judas-man!”

What more he said, I cannot tell; somehow this much reached my ears. He remained there hour after hour, pleading with the great Father for his son, his thought now lost in dull fatigue, and now uttering itself in groans for lack of words, until at length the dawn looked in on the night-weary earth, and into the sorrow-laden heart of the suffering parent, bringing with it a comfort he did not seek to understand.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XVI

BUT it brought no solace to the mind of his weak and guilty son. He had succeeded once more in temporarily stifling his conscience with false comfort, and slept the sleep of the houseless, who look up to no watchful eye over them, and whose covering is narrower than they can wrap themselves in. Ah, those sleepless nights out in the eternal cold! So cold was he, that if he had seen his mother come down in the morning with her dim eyes, he would never have asked himself what could be her trouble; would not have had sympathy enough even to see that she was unhappy; would never have suspected himself the cause of her red eyes and aching head! At this time the only good thing in him was the uneasiness of his heart, the trouble of his mind; there was not good enough to make him desire to share his pain with any friend. But there was no way round the purifying fire; he could not escape it; he *must* pass through it!

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XVII

How little knows the world what a power among men is the man who simply and really believes, hoping in Him who came to save the world from its sins! He may be neither wise nor prudent; he may be narrow and dim-sighted even in the things he loves best; they may promise him much that he is unable to claim from them, and yield him therefore but a poor fragment of the joy that might be his; he may represent them to others so that they wear no attractive hues, clothe themselves in no word of power; and yet, if he has but that love to his neighbour which love to his God must awake, he is always a redeeming, reconciling influence among his fellows — such of them, namely, as, knowing less and hoping less than he, have yet the same simple heart, open to the influence of the true Human, which is in reality the true Divine. The Robertsons were genial of heart, loving and tender toward man or woman that needed them; their door was always on the latch for such to enter and find help. If the parson insisted on the wrath of God against sin, he did not fail to give

SALTED WITH FIRE

assurance of His tenderness toward such as had fallen in the greatness of their way. Together the godly pair persuaded Isobel of the eager forgiveness of the Son of Man. They showed her that he could not drive from him the very chief of sinners, but tenderly loved — nothing less than *loved* — anyone who, having sinned, repented and returned to the Father. She would doubtless, they said, have to bear her trespass in the eyes of unforgiving women, but he would lift her high, and receive her into the home of the glad-hearted, the kingdom of heaven.

But poor Isy, who regarded her fault as both against God and the man who had misled her, and was sick at the thought of being such as she judged herself, said that nothing God himself could do could ever restore her, — could ever make it that she had not fallen; and nothing less than such a contradiction, such an impossibility, could make her clean. God might be ready to forgive her, but he could not love her. Jesus might have made satisfaction to him for her sin, but that made no difference in her. She was troubled that Jesus should have so suffered, but how could that give her back her purity, or the peace of mind she once had? That at least was gone for ever! The life that lay in front of her took the form of an unchanging gloom, a desert region whence the sweet gladness had withered,

SALTED WITH FIRE

and whence could issue no purifying wind of God to blow from her the airs of the grave by which she seemed even physically haunted. Never to all eternity could she be innocent again. Life was no more worth doing anything in. It had no interest for her now. She was, and must remain just what she was, for, alas, she could not cease to be!

Such thoughts had at one period ceaselessly ravaged her life, but had for some time been growing duller and deader; now again, revived by goodness and sympathy, they had resumed their gnawing and scorching, and she grew yet more hateful to herself. Even those who thus befriended and comforted her, she thought, could never cease to regard her as what they knew she was. But strange to say, with this revival of her sufferings, came also a requicken- ing of her long-dormant imagination, cherished, doubtless, by the peace that surrounded her. First her dreams, then her broodings, began to be haunted with sweet embodiments. As if the agonised question of the guilty Claudius were answered to her, as if to assure her that there was "rain enough in the sweet heavens to wash her white as snow," she would wake from a dream where she stood in blessed nakedness with a deluge of cool, comforting rain pouring upon her from the sweetness of those heavens — to

SALTED WITH FIRE

fall asleep again, and dream of a soft strong west wind blowing from her the evil odours that seemed to have haunted her for years as the blood of Duncan persecuted the nostrils of the wretched Lady Macbeth. And every night to her sinful bosom came back the soft innocent hands of the child she had lost. But ever and again she would dream that she was Hagar, who had cast her child away, and was fleeing from the sight of his death, — only to wake and know that she had indeed fled, and had returned and sought him in vain. And more than once she dreamed that an angel came to her, and went out to look for him; but had returned only to lay him in her arms grievously mangled by some horrid beast, and she woke with the cry, “My God!” — the prevailing prayer of the labouring and heavy-laden, which went where every such prayer must go, — weeping, but comforted.

When the first few days of her sojourn with the good Samaritans were over, and she had gathered strength enough to feel that she ought no longer to be burdensome to them, but must look for work, they positively refused to let her leave them before her spirit also had regained some vital tone, and was able to “live a little;” to which end they set themselves to revive in her the hope of finding her lost child, setting inquiry on foot, in every direction, and promis-

SALTED WITH FIRE

ing to tell her the very moment her presence began to cause them inconvenience.

“Let you go, child!” exclaimed her hostess; “God forbid! Go you shall not until you go for your own sake; you cannot go for ours!”

“But I’m such a useless burden to you!”

“Was the Lord a burden to Mary and Lazarus, think ye, my poor bairn?” rejoined Mrs. Robertson.

“Don’t, ma’am, please, compare me to *him!*” sobbed Isy.

“‘Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it to me!’” she returned.

“That doesna apply to me, ma’am,” sobbed Isy. “I’m nane o’ his!”

“Who is then? Who was it he came to save? Are you not one of his lost sheep? Are you not weary and heavy-laden? Will you never let him feel at home with you? Are *you* to tell him who he is to love and who he is n’t, who he is to count his, and who are not good enough?”

Isy was quiet for a while, and silent longer than she was quiet. The foundations of her coming peace were being laid wider and dug deeper.

She still found it impossible, from the disordered state of her mind at the time, to give any notion of whereabouts she had been when she laid her child down, and, leaving him, could

SALTED WITH FIRE

not again find him. And Maggie, who had him, loving him passionately and believing him wilfully abandoned, had no desire to discover one who could claim him and was unworthy to have him. For a long time, therefore, neither she nor her father ever talked, or encouraged talk, about him; whence certain questing busy-bodies began to snuff and give tongue. It was all very well, they said, for the cobbler and his Maggie to pose as benefactors; but whose was the child? But his growth went on all the same, and however the talk might seem to concern him, happily it never reached him. Nor, Maggie flattered herself, would it ever in this world reach and trouble him; it would die away in the void, as dies a fallen wave against the heedless shore. Yet, in the not so distant city a loving woman was weeping and pining for lack of him. Her conduct, in the eyes of the minister and his wife, was not merely blameless, but sweetly and manifestly true, constantly yielding fuel to the love that encompassed her. Both mentally and spiritually she seemed to them growing rapidly, but to have lost all hope for herself. Deeper in her soul, and nearer the root of her misery than even the loss of her child, lay the character and conduct of the man to whom her attachment was inextinguishable. His apostasy from and neglect of her, and with

SALTED WITH FIRE

the constantly gnawing sense of her pollution, burned at the bands of her life; and her friends soon began to fear that she was on the verge of a slow downward slide upon which there is seldom any turning.

Now the parson and his wife had long been on friendliest terms with the farmer and his wife of Stonecross; and, brooding on the condition and needs of their guest, it was natural that the thought of Mrs. Blatherwick should occur to them as one who might be able to render them help in their perplexity. Difficulties were in the way, however, chiefly that of conveying a true conception of the nature and character of the woman in whom they desired her interest, but if she once saw her, there could be no fear of the result; while, received as an inmate at the farm, she was certain to leave it without having in any way compromised them: they were confident she would never belie the character they were prepared to give her. Neither was there any one at the farm for whom it was possible to dread intercourse with her, seeing that since the death of their only daughter, about two years ago, they had not had a servant in the house. It was concluded therefore between the two that Mr. Robertson should go to their friends, and tell them all he knew about Isy, and say everything he could for her.

SALTED WITH FIRE

It was a morning in the decline of summer, the corn nearly full grown, but still green, without sign of the coming gold of perfection, when the minister mounted the top of the coach, to wait silent and a little anxious for the coachman to appear from the office, thrust the waybill into the pocket of his huge greatcoat, gather his reins, and climb to his perch. A journey of four hours, through a not very interesting country, but along a splendid road, carried him to the village where the soutar lived, and where James Blatherwick was parson. There a walk of about three miles awaited him, — a long and somewhat weary way to the town minister, — accustomed indeed to tramping the hard pavements, but not to long walks unbroken by calls. Climbing at last the hill on which the farmhouse stood, he caught sight of Peter Blatherwick in a neighbouring field of barley stubble, with the reins of a pair of powerful Clydesdales in his hands, wrestling with the earth as it strove to wrench from his hold the stilts of the plough whose share and coulter he was guiding through it. Peter's delight was in the open air, and hard work in it. He was as far above the vulgar idea that a man rises in the social scale by ceasing to labour with his hands, as he was from imagining that a man rose in the kingdom of heaven when he was made a bishop.

SALTED WITH FIRE

As to his higher nature, the farmer believed in God,—that is, he tried to do what God required of him, and was thus on the straight road to know him. He talked little about religion, and was no partisan. When he heard people advocating or opposing the claims of this or that division of the Church, he would turn away with a smile such as men yield to the talk of children. He had no time, he would say to his wife, for that kind of thing: he had enough to do, he said, to practise a little of what was beyond dispute.

Peter was a reading man, one who not merely drank at every open source he came across, but thought over what he read, and was, therefore, a man of true intelligence, regarded by his neighbours with more than ordinary respect. He had been the first in the district to lay hold of the discoveries in chemistry applicable to agriculture, and had made use of them, with notable results, upon his own farm; setting thus an example which his neighbours were so ready to follow that the region, nowise remarkable for its soil, soon became remarkable for its crops. The most noteworthy thing in him, however, was his humanity, and the strength of his family affections, though there was no self-consciousness of the fact, neither show of it in his behaviour. He had a strong drawing, not to his immediate

SALTED WITH FIRE

relations only, but to all of his blood, and they were not few, for he came of an ancient family, which had been long settled in that neighbourhood. In worldly affairs he was well to do, having added a little to the little his father had left him; but he was no lover of money, for he was open-handed even to his wife, upon whom your money-grub generally exercises first his parsimony. There was, however, no great need to spend at Stonecross, and less temptation from without; living as well as simple heart could desire, the farm itself was equal to the supply of much the greater part of their daily wants.

In disposition he was a good-humoured, even merry man, with a playful answer almost always ready.

The minister waved a greeting to the farmer, and went on to the house, which stood with its low gable toward him. Late summer still lorded it in the land; merely a few fleecy clouds shared the blue of the sky with the ripening sun; and on the hot ridges the air pulsed and trembled like vaporised layers of mother-of-pearl.

At the end of the idle lever, no sleepy old horse was now making his monotonous rounds; his radiance, born of age and sunshine, was now quenched in the dark of the noonday stall; but the peacock still strutted among the ricks, as conscious of his glorious plumage, as regardless

SALTED WITH FIRE

of the ugliness of his feet, as ever; now and then checking the rhythmic movement of his neck, undulating green and blue, to scratch the ground with those ugly feet, and dart his ugly beak spitefully at the grain they exposed, or from the steeple of his lifted throat to utter his self-satisfaction in a hideous cry.

In the gable before him, he passed a low window, through which he had a glimpse of the pretty, old-fashioned parlour within, and, going round to the front, there knocked at the nearest of two green-painted doors.

Mrs. Blatherwick came herself to open it, and, finding who it was that knocked, — of all men she knew the most welcome in her present mood, — received him with a hearty gladness.

For was he not a minister? and was not he who caused all the trouble she had a minister also? She was not, indeed, going to open her heart and let him see into its sorrow; for her son was far more to her than any but her husband, and to confess him the cause of the least anxiety to her, would be faithless and treacherous; still the unexpected appearance of Mr. Robertson was a comfort to her, and like the dawn of a winter morning upon her long night of pain.

She led him into the low-ceiled parlour, into the green gloom of the big hydrangea that filled

SALTED WITH FIRE

the front window, and the ancient scent of the withered rose-leaves in the gorgeous China-bowl on the green, gold-bordered table-cover. The minister, after a few kind commonplaces, sat for a moment silently pondering how to begin. But he did not ponder long, for his way was to rush headlong at whatever seemed to harbour a lion, and come at once to the death-grapple.

Marion Blatherwick was a good-looking woman, with a quiet strong expression, and sweet grey eyes. The daughter of a country-surgeon, she had been left an orphan without means; but was so generally respected that every one said Mr. Blatherwick had never done better than when he married her. There had very early grown up a sense of distance between her and her son, and now her heart would sometimes go longing after him as if he were one of those who died in their infancy and who seemed altogether beyond her reach. But she never had felt separated from her daughter; although she too was gone beyond the range of eye or ear, there was no division, only distance, between them.

"I have taken the liberty, Mrs. Blatherwick, of coming to ask your help in a great perplexity," began Mr. Robertson, with an embarrassment she had never seen in him before, which bewildered her not a little.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Weel, sir, it’s an honour ye do me, — a great honour, for which I hae to thank ye, I’m sure!” she answered.

“Bide ye, mem, till ye hear what it is,” returned the minister. “We hae a puir lass at hame, ’at my wife and mysel’ hae taen a great interest in, and we’re maist at oor wits’ end what to do wi’ her neist. She’s sair oot o’ hert, and oot o’ health, and oot o’ houp, and in fac’ she stan’s in desperate need o’ a cheenge.”

“Weel, that ouchtna to be a difeeculty to mak’ a wark about atween auld frien’s like oorsel’s, Maister Robertson. — Ye wad hae us tak’ her in for a whilie, till she luiks up a bit, puir thing! — Hoo auld may she be?”

“She can hardly be mair nor twenty, or about that, — sic like as your ain bonny lassie would hae been by this time, gien she had ripened here, i’stead o’ gaein’ yon’er to the gran’ finishin’ schule o’ the just made perfec’. Weel min’ I upo’ her bonny face! And, ’deed, this ane’s nae that unlike her!”

“Eh, sir, fess her to me as fest as ye can! My hert’s waitin’ for her a’ready! Her mither maunna hae to lose her!”

“She has nae mither, puir thing! And ye maun do naething in a hurry; I maun tell ye about her first!”

“I’m content ’at she’s a frien’ o’ yours, sir.

SALTED WITH FIRE

I ken weel ye would never hae me tak' intill ma hoose ane that wasna fit,—and a' the lads about the place frae mornin' till nicht!”

“Indeed she *is* a frien' o' mine, mem; and I hae nae dreid o' onything happening ye wouldna like. She's in ower sair trouble to be feart at. The fac' is, she's had a terrible misfortun!”

The good woman started, drew herself up a little, and said hurriedly, —

“There's no a wean, is there?”

“'Deed is there, mem! — but pairt o' the meesery is, the bairn's disappeart; and she's brakin' her heart aboot him. She's maist oot o' her min', mem. No that she's onything but perfec'ly reasonable, and gies never a grain o' trouble. I canna doobt she'll be a great help to ye, and that ilka minute ye see fit to lat her bide. But she's jist huntit wi' the idea that the bairnie's gane, — that she's left him, she kensna whaur. Verily, mem, she's ane o' the lambs o' the Lord's ain flock.”

“That's no the w'y the lambs o' *his* flock behave themsel's. I doobt, sir, ye're lattin' yer hert rin awa' wi' yer jeedgment.”

“I hae aye coontit Mary Magdalen ane o' the Lord's ain yowies, that he left the lave to luik for; this is sic anither. Gien ye help him to come upon her, ye'll carry her hame atween ye

SALTED WITH FIRE

rej'icin'. And ye min' hoo he stude atween ane far waur nor her, and the ill men that would fain hae shamet her, and sent them oot like sae mony tykes — thae gran' Pharisees — wi' their tails tuckit in atween their hin' legs! — Sair affrontit they war, doobtless. — But I maun be gaein', mem, for we're no vera like to agree. My Maister's no o' the same min' as you, mem, about sic affairs — sae I maun gang. But I would just remin' ye, mem, that she's at this present i' *my* hoose, wi' my wife, and my wee bit lassie, that hings about her as gien she was an angel come doon to see the bonny place this warl luiks frae up there. Eh, puir lammie; the stanes ought to be foewer upo' thae hill-sides!"

"What for that, Maister Robertson?"

"'Cause there's sae mony whaur human herts ought to be. Come awa', doggie," he added, rising.

"Dear me, sir! haena ye a grain o' patience to waur upon a puir menseless body like me?" cried Marion, wringing her hands in dismay. "To think *I* sud be nice whaur my Lord was sae free!"

"Aye," returned the minister, "he was as clean as ever, wi' mony ane sic like as her inside the hert o' him! 'Gang awa', and dinna do the like again,' was a' he said to that ane! — and ye may weel be sure she never did! And now

SALTED WITH FIRE

she and Mary are followin' wi' yer ain Isy, i' the vera futsteps o' the great shepherd, throuw the gowany leys o' the New Jerusalem — whaur it may be they ca' her Isy yet, as they ca' this ane I hae to gang hame till."

"Ca' they her *that*, sir? Eh, gar her come, gar her come! I wud fain cry upo' *Isy* ance mair, meanin' her to come! — Sit ye doon, sir, shame upon me! — and tak' something efter yer lang walk. — Will ye no bide the nicht wi' 's, and gang back by the mornin's coch?"

"I will that, mem — and thank ye kindly! I'm a bit fatiguit wi' the hill-road, and the walk a wee langer than I'm used till. — Ye maun hae pity upo' my kittle temper, mem, and no drive me to ower muckle shame o' mysel'!" he concluded, wiping his forehead.

"And to think," cried his hostess, "that my hard hert should be the cause o' sic a word frae ane o' the Lord's servan's that serve him day and nicht! I beg yer pardon, and that richt heumbly, sir! I daurna say I'll never do the like again, but I'm no sae likely to transgress a second time as the first. Lord, keep the doors o' my lips, that words comena thoughtless oot, and shame me and them that hear me! — I maun gang and see aboot yer denner, sir; I s' no be lang."

"Yer gracious words, mem, are mair nor

SALTED WITH FIRE

meat and drink to me. I could, like Elijah, go in the strength of them — maybe something less than forty days, but it would be by the same sort o' strength as that angel's-food gied the prophet!"

Marion hurried none the less for such a speech; and soon the minister had both eaten his supper, and was seated, in the cool of a green summer evening, in the garden before the house, among roses and lilies and poppy-heads, and long pink-striped grasses, enjoying a pipe with the farmer, who had anticipated the hour for unyoking, and hurried home to have a talk with Mr. Robertson. The minister opened wide his heart, and told them all he knew of Isy and thought, perceiving nothing of their vague misery about James and his suspected secret. But the prospect of aiding one in the effort to rise to a new life was the best comfort he could have brought them. And so prejudiced were they in her favour by what he said of her, and the arguments he brought to show the judgment of the world in her case tyrannous and false, that what anxiety might yet remain as to the new relation into which they were about to enter, was soon absorbed in hopeful expectation at her appearance.

"But," he said, "you will have to be wise as serpents, lest you kep a lost sheep on her

SALTED WITH FIRE

w'y back to the shepherd, and she lie theroot, exposed to the prowlin' wolf. Before God, I would rather share wi' her in *that* day, than wi' them that keppit her!"

That night they all slept well in the hope of good on its way, and in the morning the minister started early to mount the return-coach; with a lightened heart, indeed, but the new anxiety of persuading her who needed the help to accept it now it was offered. But he was startled, indeed dismayed, at the pallor that overwhelmed Isy's look when, following his assurance of the welcome that awaited her, she heard the name and abode of her new friends.

"They 'll be wantin' to ken a' thing!" she sobbed.

"Tell you them," returned the minister, "everything they have a right to know; they are good people, and will not ask more. Beyond that, they will respect your silence."

"There's but ae thing, as ye ken, sir, that I canna, and winna, tell. To haud my tongue about that is the ae particle o' honesty left possible to me! It's eneuch I should hae been the cause o' the puir man's sin, and I'm no gaein' to bring upon him ony o' the consequences o' 't as weel. God keep the doors o' my lips!"

"We will not go into the question whether

SALTED WITH FIRE

you or he was the more to blame," returned the parson; "but I heartily approve of your resolve, and admire your firmness in holding to it. The time *may* come when you ought to tell, but until then I shall not even allow myself to wonder who the faithless man may be."

Isy burst into tears.

"Dinna ca' him that, sir! Dinna gar me doobt him. Latna the thought cross my min' that he could hae helpit it! For me, I deserve naething; and my bonny bairn maun by this time be back hame to Him that sent him!"

Assured that her secret would be respected by those to whom she was going, she ceased to show any farther reluctance to accept the shelter they offered her. And, in truth, beneath the dread of encountering James Blatherwick's parents, lay hidden in her mind the fearful joy of a chance that some day, herself unseen, she might catch a glimpse of the man she still loved with all the forgiving tenderness of a true, therefore a strong heart; for is there any strength but what is founded on truth? God is true if every man be a liar, and God loves if he loves alone. With a trembling, fluttering bosom she took her place beside her friend, to go with him to the refuge he had found for her.

SALTED WITH FIRE

Once more out in the open world, with which she had as yet had so little of a joyous acquaintance, that same world began at once to work the will of its Maker upon her poor torn soul, and afar in its hidden deeps the slow process of healing was already begun. Sorrow would often return unbidden, would at times even rise like a crested wave and threaten with despair the last hour of her victorious conflict, but Reality, long hidden from her by the lying judgments of men and women of this world, was beginning to reveal itself to her tear-blinded vision, and Hope was lifting a feeble head above the weeds of the ugly heap: soon, soon she would see and understand how little the Father, whose judgment is the truth of things, cares what any one of his children may at any time have been or done, the moment that child gives himself up to be made what he would have him be! Looking down into the hearts of men, he sees differences there of which the self-important world takes no heed; and many that are first are in his eyes the last; and what he sees, alone *is*: kings and emperors are nowhere, and their judgments are forgotten; a gutter-child, a thief, a girl who had never in this world even a notion of purity, may lie smiling in the arms of the Eternal, while the head of a lordly house which still flour-

SALTED WITH FIRE

ishes like a green bay-tree may be wandering with the dogs outside the city.

Out in the open world, I say, the power of the present God began at once to work upon Isobel, for she looked into his open face dimly, vaguely sketched in the mighty something we call Nature, — chiefly in the great vault we call Heaven, the *Upheaved*. Shapely but undefined, perfect in form, yet limitless in depth; blue and persistent, yet ever evading capture by human heart in human eye, — this sphere of fashioned boundlessness, of definite shapelessness, called up in her heart the formless children of upheavedness, grandeur, namely, and awe, hope, namely, and desire, all rushing together toward the dawn of the unspeakable One, who, dwelling in that heaven, is above all heavens — mighty and unchangeable, yet childlike; inexorable, yet tender as never was mother, and devoted as never yet was child save one! Isy, indeed, understood little of all this; yet she wept, she knew not why, and it was not for sorrow.

But when the coach-journey was over, and without knowing it, she turned her back upon the house where her child lay, and entered the desolate hill-country, with so little attraction save for such to whom a present childhood has revealed it, a strange feeling began to invade

SALTED WITH FIRE

her consciousness. Seeming at first but the return of a mood, then of an old dream, then of a painful, confused, half-forgotten memory, it cleared and settled at last into the conviction that she had been in that same region before, and had had although a passing, yet a painful acquaintance with it; and at last she concluded that she must be near the very spot where she had left and lost her baby. All that had up to that moment befallen her seemed fused in a troubled conglomerate of hunger and cold and weariness, help and hurt, deliverance and returning pain, and to mingle inextricably with the vision around her, there condensing into memory of that one event, of which this was the actual scene — widespread wastes of heather and peat, great stones here and there half-buried in it, half-sticking out of it, and she waiting there for something to come to pass: surely behind this veil of the Visible a child must somewhere stand with outstretched arms, hungering after his mother! Memory must that very moment be trembling into vision! Surely at length her heart's desire was coming near to her expectant soul! But alas! even this certainty of recollection, this assurance of prophetic anticipation, faded from her, and of the memory itself remained nothing but a ruin; and all this came and passed within her while

SALTED WITH FIRE

she walked wearily by the side of her companion — meditating a glad sermon for the next Sunday about the lost sheep carried home with rejoicing, and forgetting how unfit was the poor sheep beside him for such a fatiguing tramp up and down hill along the broken country road, little better than the bed of a torrent, which it was indeed in the winter. But all at once she darted aside from the rough track, and ran like one demented into a great clump of heather, which she began to search through and through, while the minister stopped and watched her, fearing she had again lost her wits. At length she got on the top of a stone that stood in the middle of the clump, and, having again and again gazed all around her, descended with a look of hopelessness, and she came slowly back to him, saying, —

“I beg yer pardon, sir; I thought I had a glimpse o’ my bairnie amo’ the heather! This maun be the vera spot whaur I left him!”

A moment more, and she faltered feebly, “Is’t far we hae to gang yet, sir?” and before he could answer her, staggered to the side of the road, and sinking upon the bank that bordered it, gave a great gasp and lay still.

The minister saw in a moment that he had been cruel in expecting her to walk so far, and

SALTED WITH FIRE

made haste to lay her comfortably on the top of the bank among the long heather; then he waited in some anxiety for her to come to herself. He could see no water, but at least she had plenty of air!

In a little while she began to recover, sat up, and would have risen to resume her journey. But the big minister, filled with compunction, took her in his long arms, to carry her up the crown of the ascent. She expostulated, but was unable even to resist his determination. Strong as he was, however, and light as was her weight, he found it no easy task to bear her up the last part of the steep rise, and was glad to set her down at the top, where a fresh breeze was waiting to revive them both. She thanked him like any little girl whose father had come to her help, and they seated themselves together on the highest point of the moor, with a large, desolate land on every side of them.

“Oh, sir, but ye *are* good to me!” she resumed. “That brae just minded me o’ the Hill of Difficulty in the *Pilgrim’s Progress!*”

“You know that story, then?” said the minister.

“My old grannie used to make me read it to her as she lay dying. I thought it long and tiresome then, but since you took me home, I have remembered many things in it; I had

SALTED WITH FIRE

come to the house of the Interpreter. You've made me understand, sir!"

"I am glad of that, Isy! You see I know some things that make me very glad, and I want them to make you glad too. And the thing that makes me gladdest of all is just that God is what he is. To know that such a being is God over us and in us, makes our very existence a most precious delight. His children, those of them that know him, are all glad just because he *is* and they are his children. Do you think a strong man like me would read sermons and say prayers and talk to people, and do nothing but such shamefully easy work, if he did not believe what he said?"

"I'm sure, sir, you had hard enough work with me! I am a bad one to teach! I thought I knew all that you have had such trouble to make me see! I was in a bog of ignorance and misery, but now I am getting my head up, and seeing about me! Please, let me ask you one thing, sir — how is it that, when the thought of God comes to me, I always draw back, afraid of him? If he be the kind of person you say he is, why can't I go close up to him?"

"I confess to the same foolishness at times," answered the minister. "It can only be because we do not yet see God as he is — and

SALTED WITH FIRE

that must be because we do not yet really understand Jesus — do not see the glory of God in his face. God is just like him."

And the parson fell awondering why it could be that so many, gentle and guileless as this woman-child, should recoil from the thought of the perfect One. Why should they not be always and irresistibly drawn toward the very idea of God? Why should they not run to see and make sure whether God were indeed such a one or not? whether he was really Love itself, or only after a fashion? It made him think about many things — concerning which he soon discovered that he had been teaching them without *knowing* them — for, indeed, how could he *know* things that were not true and therefore could not be known? He had indeed been saying that God was Love, and yet teaching many things about him that were not lovable!

They sat thinking and talking, with silences between; and, all the time, the day-star was rising unnoted in their hearts. At length they rose themselves and resumed their journey.

The door stood open to receive them, but ere they reached it a bright-looking little woman, with delicate lines of ingrained red in a sorrowful, waiting face, appeared in it, looking out for them with questioning eyes, like a

SALTED WITH FIRE

mother-bird whose feet were just leaving hold of the threshold of her nest to fly to meet them. Through the film that blinded her expectant eyes, Marion saw at once what manner of woman she was who drew nigh, and her motherhood went out to welcome her. In the love-witchery of the yearning look that humbly sought acceptance, in the hesitating approach, half-checked by gentle apology, Marion seemed to see her own Isy returned from the gates of Death, and sprang to meet her. The mediating love of the minister, obliterating itself, had made him draw lingering back a step or two, and wait for what would follow; but when he saw the two folded each in the other's arms, and the fountain of eternal love break forth at once from the two encountering hearts, his soul leaped for joy at the birth of a new love, new indeed, but not the less surely eternal, for God is Love, and Love is that which is, and was, and shall be for evermore, boundless, unconditioned, self-existent, creative! "Truly," he said in himself, "God is Love, and God is all and in all! He is no abstraction, but the one eternal Individual! In him Love evermore breaks forth anew into fresh personality in every new consciousness, in every new child of the one creating Father. In every burning heart, in every thing that hopes and fears and

SALTED WITH FIRE

is, Love is the creative presence, the centre, the source of life, yea, Life itself; yea, God himself! 'I said, ye are gods!'"

The elder woman drew herself a little back, held the poor white-faced thing at arm's-length, and looked her through the face into the heart.

"My bonny lamb!" she cried, and pressed the younger again to her bosom; "come hame, and be a guid bairn, and ill man sall never touch ye mair! There's *my* man waiting for ye to tak' ye and haud ye safe!"

Isy looked up, and over the shoulder of her hostess saw the strong paternal face of the farmer, full of silent welcome. For the strange emotion that filled him he did not seek to account. His mood he had no more made than himself! Such as he was, such he would be—content with what he found himself. But his will was lord over his mood, and he kept himself quiet.

"Come ben the hoose, lassie," he said, and led the way to the parlour, where the red sunset was shining through the low gable window, filling the place with the glamour of departing glory. "Sit ye doon upo' the sofa there; ye maun be sair tired! But surely ye haena come a' the lang road frae Tiltbowie upo' yer ain twa wee, wee feet!"

"'Deed has she," answered the minister, who

SALTED WITH FIRE

had followed them into the room, "the more shame to me who let her do it!"

But the hostess was lingering outside the door of it, and wiped away the tears that would keep flowing. For still the one question, "What can be amiss wi' Jamie?" haunted and harried her heart; and with it was the idea, although vague and formless, that their good-will to the wandering outcast of the world might perhaps do something to make up for whatever ill thing Jamie had done. At last, instead of entering after them, she turned away to the kitchen, and made haste to get the tea, while Isy sank back in the wide sofa, lost in refuge, and the minister said to himself as he saw her look, "Surely she is feeling just as we shall all feel when first we know that nothing is near us but the Love itself that was before all worlds, and there is no doubt more, and no questioning more!" Only the heart of the father was full of the same old discontent, the same longing after the heart of his boy that had never learned to cry "*Father!*"

But soon they sat down to the pleasantest of all meals, a farmhouse tea. Hardly anyone spoke, and hardly anyone missed the speech, or was aware of the silence — until, from very happiness, the bereaved Isobel thought of her forsaken child, and burst into silent tears. Then

SALTED WITH FIRE

the mother, who sorrowed with such a different and bitterer sorrow, divining at once her thought, and whence it came, rose, and standing behind her said, —

“Noo ye maun jist come awa’ wi’ me, and I s’ pit ye till yer bed, and lea’ ye there! — Na, na; say gude nicht to naebody! Ye’ll see the minister again i’ the mornin’!”

With that she took her away, half-carrying her close-pressed, half leading her: Marion was no bigger than Isy, but much stronger, and could easily have carried her to bed. That night both mothers slept well, and both dreamed of their mothers and of their children. But in the morning nothing remained of their dreams except a great hope in the great Father.

When Isy in the morning entered the little parlour, she found she had slept so long that breakfast was over, the minister smoking his pipe in the garden, and Peter busy in the yard. But Marion, hearing her, appeared at once, bringing her breakfast, and beaming with ministration. Bethinking herself, however, that she would eat it better if left to herself, she went back to her work. In about five minutes, however, Isy joined her, and began at once to lend her a helping hand.

“Hoot, hoot, my dear!” cried her hostess, “ye haena taen time eneuch to make a dacent

SALTED WITH FIRE

brakfast o' t! Gang awa' back, and put mair intill ye. Ye maun learn to ate, or we 'll never hae ony guid o' ye!"

"I just canna eat for glaidness," returned Isy. "Ye're that guid to me, that I daur hardly think about it for greitin'! — Lat me help ye, mem, and I'll be hungry 'gen dennertime!"

Mrs. Blatherwick understood, and said no more. She showed her what to do to help her; and Isy, happy as a child, came and went at her pleasant orders rejoicing. Probably, had she started in life with less devotion, she might have fared better; but the end was not yet, and that must be known before we dare judge the process: result explains history. For the present it is enough to say that, with the repose of mind she now enjoyed, with the good food she had and the wholesome exercise, for Mrs. Blatherwick took care she should not have to work too hard, with the constant kindness shown her, and the steady growth of her faith and hope, her light-heartedness first, and then her good looks, began to return, and soon the dainty little creature was both prettier and lovelier than before; and at the same time her face and figure, her ways and motions, went on mingling themselves so inextricably with Marion's impressions of her vanished Isy, that at length it seemed to her mistress — for so of her own will she always

SALTED WITH FIRE

called Mrs. Blatherwick — that she never could be able to part with her. She had not for some days had anyone to help her, having lately dismissed one, and been waiting to see how Isy would turn out, whether capable or helpless. Nor had she long to wait assurance on that point, for that same day she found her equal to anything and everything necessary in the house, and that she had but to put her hands to the work of the dairy to compass that as well. So she settled into the place, as if she and it had been made for each other.

It did sometimes cross Isy's mind, with a sting of doubt, whether it was fair to hide from her new friends the full facts of her sorrowful history, and the relation in which she stood to them; but to quiet her conscience she had only to reflect that it was solely for the sake of the son they loved that she kept her silence. Further than his protection, she had no design, cherished no scheme. The idea of compelling, or even influencing him to do her justice, never crossed her horizon. On the contrary, she was possessed by the notion that she had done him a great wrong, and was in danger of rendering it irretrievable. She had never thought the thing out as between her and him, never even said to herself that he too had been to blame. The exaggerated notion of her share in the blame had

SALTED WITH FIRE

found a lodgment and got fixed in her mind, partly from her acquaintance with the popular judgment concerning such as she that filled the moral air around her, partly and yet more from her humble and constant readiness to take any possible blame to herself. Even had she been capable of bringing the consequences into comparison, the injury she had done to his prospects as a minister would have seemed to her revering soul a far greater wrong than any suffering or loss he had brought upon her; for what was she beside him? what her life to the frustration of such prospects as his? Nor was the injury she had done him the less grievous that it had been unintentional; while the sole alleviation of her misery was that she seemed hitherto to have escaped involving him in the consequences, which, so far as she could tell, remained concealed from him, as well as from such whose knowledge of them might have rendered them operative to his hurt. In truth, never was less worthy man more devotedly shielded; and never was hidden wrong turned more eagerly and persistently into loving service! Many and many a time did the loving heart of James's mother, as she watched Isy's deft and dainty deeds and motions, regret even with bitterness that such a capable and love-inspiring girl should have rendered herself unworthy of her

SALTED WITH FIRE

son, whom, notwithstanding the disparity of their positions, she would gladly have welcomed as a daughter, had she but been spotless, and fit to be loved by him.

In the evenings, when the work of the day was done, Isy used to ramble about the moor, in the lingering rays of the last of the sunset and the long twilight that followed; and in those unhasting, gentle hours, so spiritual in their tone that they seem to come straight from the eternal spaces, where is no recalling and no forgetting, where time, space, and spirit are at rest, Isy first began to read with understanding. For now first she fell into the company of books — old-fashioned ones, no doubt, but perhaps even therefore better for her, who was an old-fashioned, gentle, ignorant, thoughtful child. Among the rest in the farmhouse, she came upon the two volumes of a book called the *Preceptor*, which contained various treatises laying down “the first principles of polite learning.” These drew her eager attention; and with one or other of these not very handy volumes in her hand, she would steal out of sight of the farm, and, lapt in the solitude of the moor, there sit and read until at last the light itself could read no more. Even the Geometry she found there attracted her not a little; the Rhetoric and Poetry drew her yet more; and

SALTED WITH FIRE

most of all, the Natural History, with its engravings of beasts and birds, poor as it was, delighted her. From these antiquated repertories of science and art, she gathered much, and chiefly the most valuable knowledge of her ignorance. There, also, searching in a garret to which she had free access, she found an English translation of Klopstock's *Messiah*, a poem which in the middle of the last century caused a great excitement in Germany, and did not a little, I fancy, for the development of religious feeling in the country during that and the following century, its slow-subsiding ripple not altogether unfelt possibly even to this day. She read the book through in these her twilight strolls, not without risk of many a fall over bush and stone ere practice had taught her to see at once both the path for her feet and that for her eyes over the printed page. The book both pleased and suited her, the parts that interested her most being those about the repentant angel, Abaddon; who, if I remember aright, haunted the steps of the Saviour, and hovered about the cross while he was crucified. The great question with her for a long time was, whether the Saviour must not have forgiven him; but by slow degrees it became at last clear to her that he who came but to seek and save the lost, could not close the door against one that sought

SALTED WITH FIRE

return to his fealty. It was not until she knew the souter, however, that at length she understood the tireless redeeming of the Father, who had sent men blind and stupid and ill-conditioned, into a world where they had to learn almost everything.

There were some few books accessible of a more theological sort, which happily she neither could understand nor was able to imagine she understood, and which therefore she instinctively refused, as containing food neither for thought nor feeling. There was, besides, Dr. Johnson's *Rasselas*, which mildly interested her, and a book called *Dialogues of Devils*, which she read with avidity; and thus, if indeed her ignorance did not grow much less, at least her knowledge of it grew a little greater.

And all the time she was haunted with the conviction that she had been in that region before, and that indeed she was very near the spot where she had laid down and lost her child.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XVIII

IN the meantime, the said child, a splendid boy, was the delight of the humble dwelling to which he had been borne in triumph, although the mind of the soutar was not a little exercised as to how far their right in the boy approached the paternal: were they justified in regarding him as their love-property, before exhaustive inquiry as to who could claim and might reappropriate him? For a duty was infinite; and no degree of solicitude or fulfilment of obligation could liberate the finder of a thing lost from the necessity of restoring it upon demand: none could be certain that the child had been deliberately and finally abandoned! Maggie, indeed, regarded the baby as hers by right of rescue; but what if by retaining him she were depriving her who had lost him of the one remaining link between her and humanity, that held her fast to the ultimate righteousness, and might at last deliver her from the snare of the enemy? Surely to take and withhold from any woman her child, would be to sever the one tie that bound her to

SALTED WITH FIRE

the unseen and eternal! And the souter saw that for the sake of the truth in Maggie, she must omit no possible endeavour to restore the child to the care of his mother.

So the next time Maggie brought the crowing infant to the kitchen, her father, who sat as usual under the small window, to gather all the light to be had upon his work, said, glancing up at the child, and turning his eyes again to his work: —

“ Eh, the bonny, glaid cratur! Wha can say 'at sic as he 'at haena the twa 'm ane to see till them getna frae Himsel' a mair partic'lar and carefu' regaird, gien that could be, than ither bairns! I would fain believe the same!”

“ Eh, father, but ye aye think bonny!” exclaimed Maggie. “ Mony ane has been dingin' 't in upo' me 'at sic as he maist aye turn oot onything but weel whan they step oot intill the warl. Eh, but we maun tak' care o' 'im, father! Whaur *would* I be wi'oot you at my back!”

“ And God at the back o' me, bairn!” rejoined the souter. “ It's possible the Almichty may hae special diffeeculty wi' sic as he, but nane can jeedge o' onything or ony body till they see the hin'er en' o' 't a'. But I'm thinkin' it maun aye be harder for ane that hasna his ain mither to luik till. Ony ither body, be she as guid as she may, maun be but a mak'shift!

SALTED WITH FIRE

For ae thing he winna get the same naitral disciplene ilka mither cat gi'es its kitlins! "

"Maybe! maybe! — I couldna lay a finger upo' the bonny cratur mysel'!" said Maggie.

"There 't is!" returned her father. "I dinna think," he went on, "we can expect muckle frae the wisdom o' the mither o' 'm, gien she had him, nor yet frae that o' ither fowk 'at 'll be sair enough upon 'im though nane wiser! It 'll be but puir disciplene to luik upon 'im as ane in wha's existance God has had nae share — or jist as muckle as gi'es him a grup o' him for his licks! There's a heap o' mystery aboot a' thing, Maggie, and that frae the vera beginnin' to the vera en'; and maybe yon bairnie's in waur danger than or'nar jist frae you and me, Maggie! Eh, but I wuss his ain mother were gien back till him! And wha can tell but she's needin' him waur nor he's needin' her — though there maun aye be something he canna get, — 'cause ye 're no his ain mither, Maggie, and I'm no his ain gran'father!"

The adoptive mother broke into a howl like that of a sorely wounded dam.

"Father, father, ye 'll brak the hert o' me!" she all but yelled.

Laying the child on the top of her father's hands as they were in the very act of drawing his waxed ends, and thus changing him per-

SALTED WITH FIRE

force from cobbler to nurse, she bolted from the kitchen to hide her misery in solitude. Throwing herself down by her bedside, she sought instinctively and unconsciously the presence of him who sees in secret. For a time, however, she had nothing to say even to *him*, and could only moan on in the darkness that lay beneath her closed eyelids. Suddenly she came to herself, remembering that she, too, had abandoned the child, and must go back to him.

But as she ran she heard loud noises of infantile jubilation, and, re-entering the kitchen, was at first amazed to see the soutar's hands moving as persistently if not quite so rapidly as before, while the child hung at the back of the soutar's head, in the bight of the long jack-towel he had taken from behind the door, holding on by the hair on the soutar's grey occiput. There he tugged and crowed, while his nurse bent over his work, circumspect in every movement, not once forgetting the precious thing on his back, so delighted with the new style of nursing as only now and then to make a wry face at some motion of the human machine more abrupt than usual. Evidently he took it all as done solely for his pleasure.

Maggie burst out laughing through her tears, and the child, after a futile effort to stretch out his arms to her, began to cry a little, whereupon

SALTED WITH FIRE

the mother in her, waking to a sense that he was being treated too unceremoniously, bounded to liberate him, undid the towel, and sat down with her treasure in her lap. The grandfather, availing himself of his release, gave his shoulders a little writhing shake, laughed an amused laugh, and set off boring and stitching and drawing at redoubled speed.

“Weel, Maggie,” he said interrogatively, without looking up.

“I saw ye was richt, father, and it set me greitin’ sae that I forgot the bairn and you as weel. Gang on, father; say what ye like: it’s a’ true!”

“There’s but little mair to say, lassie, noo ye hae begun to say’t to yersel’. But, believe me, though ye can never be the bairn’s ain mither, *she* can never be till ’im the same ye hae been. The pairt ye hae chosen is guid eneuch never to be taen frae ye — i’ this warl or the neist!”

“Thank ye, father, for that! I’ll dee for the bairn what I can, ohnforgotten that he’s no mine but anither wuman’s. I maunna tak’ what’s hers for mine!”

The soutar, especially while at his work, was always trying “to get,” as he said, “into his Lord’s company” — now trying to understand some recorded saying of his, now, it might be,

SALTED WITH FIRE

his reasons for saying it just then and there; and often he would be pondering why he allowed this or that to take place in the world, which was his house, where he was always present, and always at work. Humble as diligent disciple, he never doubted when once a thing had taken place that it had been his will it should so come to pass, but even where he knew that this or that must ultimately be his Lord's will, he was careful not to set his heart upon the when or how of its taking place, for he knew that evil itself, originating with man or his deceiver, must subserve the final will of the All-in-All, and he knew in his own self much that must first be set right before that will could be done in earth as it was in heaven. To this end a divine regeneration was necessary, and this process was but very vaguely discernible at the time by him in whom it was taking place, and still less by another. Therefore, he was able to welcome in his child any new manifestation of feeling, recognising even in its unexpectedness the pressure of a guiding hand in the formation of her history, revealing to herself what was in her, and making room for what was as yet undeveloped. Hence he could love what his child was *becoming*, without being able to fore-imagine the beauty on its way. Hence, too, he was able to understand St. John, where he says, "Beloved,

SALTED WITH FIRE

now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." For first, foremost, and deepest of all, he positively and absolutely believed in the man whose history he found in the Gospel: that is, he believed not only that such a man once was, and that every word he then spoke was true; but believed that he was still in the world, and that every word he then spoke had always been and was still true; therefore, believed what was yet more to the Master and to his disciple, John MacLear, that the chief end and aim of his conscious life was to live in his presence, to keep his affections ever afresh and constantly turning toward him, ever appealing to him for strength to believe and understand, and ever aspiring toward him. Hence every day he felt afresh that he was living in the house of God, among the things of his father. Many of my readers themselves will think they know the man to whom this description more or less corresponds, and indeed in Tiltbowie itself there was a general feeling about him that did him a sort of justice, even where he was least understood. In a certain far-off way men seemed to know what he was about, although the value of his pursuit they were one and all unable to estimate. What this judgment was, may be so

SALTED WITH FIRE

far gathered from the answer of the village fool to a passer-by who asked him, "Weel, and what's yer soutar about the noo?" "Ow, as usual," answered the *natural*, "turnin' up ilka muckle stane to luik for his Maister aneth it!" For in truth he believed that the Lord of men was constantly walking to and fro in the kingdom of his Father, seeing what was there going on, and doing his best to bring it to its ideal condition; that he was ever and always in the deepest sense present in it, and could at any moment show himself, if he pleased, visible in any spot. Never did John MacLear lift his eyes heavenward without a vague feeling that he might that very moment catch a sight of the glory of his coming Lord; if ever he fixed his eyes on the far horizon, it was never without a shadowy suggestion that, like a sail towering over the edge of the world, the first great flag of the Lord's hitherward march might that moment be rising between earth and heaven; — for certainly he would come unawares, and who then could tell the moment he might not set his foot on the edge of the visible, and come out of the dark in which he had hitherto clothed himself as with a garment, to appear in the ancient glory of his transfiguration? Thus was he ever on the watch, and thus never did he play the false prophet, with cries of "Lo here!" and "Lo there!" nor ever said,

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Hear the word of the Lord” when the Lord had not spoken. And even when deepest lost in watching, the lowest whisper of the march of human life was always loud enough to recall the soutar to his “work alive” — to wake him, that is, lest he should be found asleep at the coming of his Lord. His was the same live readiness that had held the ear of Maggie open to the cry of the little one on the hillside. As his daily work was ministration to the weary feet of his Master’s men, so was his soul ever awake to their sorrows and spiritual necessities.

“There’s a haill warl o’ bonny wark about me!” he would say. “I hae but to lay my han’ to what’s neist me, and it’s sure to be something that wants deein’! I’m clean ashamt when I wauk up to fin’ mysel’ deein’ naething!”

Every evening while the summer lasted, he would go out alone for a walk, generally toward a certain wood nigh the town; for there, though it was of no great extent, and its trees were small, lay a probability of escaping for a few moments from the eyes of men, and a chance of certain of another breed showing themselves.

“But,” he said to Maggie once, “I never cared vera muckle about the angels; it’s the man, the perfec’ man, wha was there wi’ the Father afore ever an angel was h’ard tell o’, that sen’s me upo’ my knees! Whan I see a man

SALTED WITH FIRE

that but 'minds me o' him, my hert rises up wi' a loup, and seems as gien it would 'maist lea' my body ahint it." "Love 's the law o' the universe," he would say, "and it jist works amazin'!"

One day, a man, seeing him approach in the near distance, and knowing he had not perceived his presence, lay down behind a great stone to watch "the mad soutar," in the hope of hearing him say something insane. As John came nearer, he saw his lips moving, and heard sounds issue from them; but as he passed nothing was audible but the same words repeated several times, with the same expression of surprise and joy, as if at something for the first time discovered: "Eh, Lord! Eh, Lord, I see! I un'er-staun'! — Lord, I'm yer ain — to the vera deith — a' yer ain! — Thy father bless thee, Lord! — I ken ye care for noucht else! — Eh, but my hert 's glaid! — that glaid, I 'maist canna speyk!"

That man never after spoke of the soutar but with a respect that seemed something like awe.

After that talk with her father about the child and his mother, a certain silent change appeared in Maggie. People saw in her a look which they read as like that of one whose child was ill, and who expected him soon to die. But what Maggie felt was only that he was not hers but the Lord's, and lent to her but for a season, and that she

SALTED WITH FIRE

must walk softly, doing all for the infant as under the eye of the Master, who might at any moment call to her from above, "Bring the child; I want him now." And although she soon became as cheerful as before, she never lost the still, solemn look as of one in the eternal spaces, who saw beyond this world's horizon. She even talked less with her father than hitherto, although at the same time she seemed to live closer to him. She did not seem, however, to try to remember his words, but to ponder something they had given her. Sometimes she would ask him to help her to understand what he had said; but even then he would not always try to make it plain. He might but answer, —

"I see, lassie; ye 're no just ready for 't! It's true, though; and the day maun come whan ye 'll see the thing itsel', and ken what it is; and that's the only w'y to win at the trowth o' 't! In fac' to see a thing, and ken a thing, and be sure a thing's true, is a' ane and the same thing!" Such a word from her father was always enough to still and content the girl's mind, and then things would go on as before. Her delight in the child, instead of growing less, went on increasing because of the *awe* rather than *dread* of having at last to give him up.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XIX

ALL this time the minister remained moody, apparently sunk in contemplation, but indeed mostly brooding, and not meditating either form or truth. Sometimes he felt indeed as if he were losing altogether his power of thinking — especially when in the middle of the week he sat down to find something to say on the Sunday. He had greatly lost interest in the questions that had occupied him so much while yet a student, imagining himself in preparation for what he called the ministry; for how was one to minister who had not yet learned to obey, and had never sought anything but his own glorification? What interest could there be in a profession where all was but profession? What pleasure could he find in holy labour who did not indeed offer his pay to purchase the Holy Ghost, but offered the Holy Ghost himself to purchase a living? No wonder he found himself at length in lack of talk wherewith to purchase his one thing needful. He had always been more or less dependent on commentaries for the joint, and even for the

SALTED WITH FIRE

cooking of it; and it was no wonder that his guests should show less and less appetite for the dinners he provided them!

The hungry sheep looked up and were not fed!
To have food to give them he must think! to think, he must be in peace! to have peace he must forget himself! to forget himself he must walk in the truth! to walk in the truth he must love God and his neighbour! Even to have interest in the dry bone of criticism, which alone he could find in his larder, he must broil it, and so burn away in the slow fire of his damp intellect every scrap of meat left upon it! His last relation to his work was departing from him, to leave him lord of a dustheap. He grubbed and nosed and scraped dog-like in the unsavoury mound, but could not uncover a single scrap that smelt of provender. The morning came at last when he recognised, with a burst of agonising sweat, that he dared not stand up before his congregation: not one written word had he to read to them; and extempore utterance was, from very vacancy, impossible to him: he could not think of even one meaningless phrase word to articulate! He flung his Concordance sprawling upon the floor, snatched up his hat and clerical cane, and, scarce knowing what he did, found himself standing at the souter's door, where already he had knocked, without a notion

SALTED WITH FIRE

in his head of anything he was come to seek. The old parson, generally in a mood to quarrel with the man he sought, had always gone straight into his workshop without warning, and always been glad once more to see him crouched there over his work; but the new parson waited helpless on the doorstep for Maggie, whom he did not want to see, to admit him to one to whom he had nothing to say.

She was occupied with her precious charge, and a few moments passed before she appeared; but she had opened the door wide before the caller had begun to discover what he might pretend to be in want of. In the last extremity of invention, a feasible thought came to him by which he might also avoid the cobbler's deep-set black eyes, of which he was always in some dread, because they seemed to probe searchingly his very thoughts.

“Do you think your father would have time,” he said humbly, “to measure me for a pair of light boots?”

Mr. Blatherwick was very particular about his foot-gear, and had hitherto always fitted himself in the country town; but he had learned that nothing he could there buy ready-made approached in quality, either of material or workmanship, what the soutar supplied to his poorest customer; for, while he would mend anything

SALTED WITH FIRE

worth mending, he would never make anything inferior.

"Ye'll get what ye want at such and such place," he would answer, "and I doobtna it'll be as guid as can be made at the siller; but for my ain pairt, ye maun excuse me!"

"'Deed, sir, he'll be baith glaid and prood to mak' ye as guid a pair o' boots as he can compass," answered Maggie. "Jist step in here, sir, and lat him ken what ye want. My bairn's greitin', and I maun gang till him, for it's seldom he cries oot!"

The minister walked in at the open door of the kitchen, and met the eyes of the soutar expectant.

"Ye're welcome, sir," said MacLear, and returned his eyes to the labour he had for a moment interrupted.

"Will you make me a nice pair of boots, Mr. MacLear? I am somewhat particular about the fit!" said the minister, as cheerily as he could.

"I'll do what I can, sir; but wi' mair readiness nor confidence," answered the shoemaker. "I canna profess assurance o' fittin' the first time, no haein' the necessar' instinc' frae the mak' o' the man to the shape o' the fut, sir."

"Of course I should like them both neat and comfortable," said the parson.

"In coorse ye wad, sir, and sae would I! I

SALTED WITH FIRE

would hae customers tak' note o' my success in followin' the paittern set afore me i' the individ-ooal fut."

"But you will allow, I suppose, that a foot is seldom as perfect now as when the divine idea of the member was first embodied by its Maker?" rejoined the minister.

"Ow, ay; there's been mony an interferin' circumstance; but whan his kingdom's come, things 'll tak' an upward turn for the redemption o' the feet as weel as the lave o' the body — as the Apostle Paul says i' the twenty-third verse o' the aucht chapter o' his epistle to the Romans; — only I'm weel advised there's no sic a thing as adoption mentioned i' the original Greek, sir. That can hae no pairt in what fowk ca's the plan o' salvation — as gien the consumin' fire o' the Love eternal could be ca'd a *plan!* Hech, minister, it scunners me! — But for the fut, it's aye perfec' eneuch to be my pattern, for it's the only ane I hae to follow! It's himsel' sets the shape o' the shune this or that man maun weir!"

"That's very true — and the same applies to every thing a man cannot help. A man has his make and his circumstances to do the best he can with, and sometimes they seem not to fit each other so well as, I hope, your boots will fit my feet."

"Ye're richt there, sir — only that no man's

SALTED WITH FIRE

bun' to follow his inclinations or his circumstances, ony mair than he's bun' to alter his fut to the shape o' a ready-made bute! But hoo wull ye hae them made, sir? — I mean what fashion o' bute wud ye hae me mak' them?"

"Oh, I leave that to you, Mr. MacLear — a sort of half-wellington, I suppose — a neat pair of short boots."

"I understand, sir."

"But now tell me," said the minister, moved by a sudden impulse, "what you think of this new fad, if it be nothing worse, of the English clergy — I mean about confession to the priest. I see they have actually prevailed upon that wretched creature we've all been reading about in the papers lately to confess the murder of her little brother. Do you think they had any right to do that? Remember, the jury had acquitted her."

" — And has she railly confessed? I *am* glaid o' that! I only wuss they could get a haud o' Madelaine Smith as weel, and persuaud *her* to confess! Eh, the state o' that puir cratur's conscience! It 'maist gars me greet to think o' 't! Gien she but confess, houp wad spring to life in her sin-oppressed soul! Eh, but it maun be a great lichtenin' to that puir Miss Kent! I'm richt glaid to hear o' 't."

"I did n't know, Mr. MacLear, that you

SALTED WITH FIRE

favoured the priesthood to such an extent. We clergy of the Presbyterians are not in the way of turning detectives, or acting as agents of human justice. There is no one, guilty or not, but is safe with us."

"As with any confessor, Papist or Protestant," said the soutar; "and if I understand your news, sir, it can only mean that they persuaded the poor soul to confess her guilt, and so put herself safe in the hands of God!"

"But is not that to come between God and the sinner?"

"Doubtless, sir, — but only in order to bring them together; to persuade the sinner to the first step toward reconciliation with God, and peace in his own mind."

"That could be had without intervention of the priest!"

"Yes, but not without the consenting will of the sinner! And in this case she would not, and did not confess until so persuaded!"

"They had no right to threaten her, as if the power lay with them!"

"If they did so, they were wrong; but in any case they did for her the best they knew! And they did get her, you tell me, to confess, and so cast from her the misery, the horror of carrying about in her secret heart the knowledge of an unforgiven crime! Christians of all denomina-

SALTED WITH FIRE

tions, I presume, hold that, to be forgiven, a sin must be confessed!"

"Yes, to God,—that is enough! No man has a right to know the sins of his neighbour!"

"Not even the man against whom the sin was committed?"

"Suppose the sin has never come abroad, but remained hidden in the heart, is a man bound to confess it? Is he, for instance, bound to tell his neighbour that he used to hate him and in his heart wish him evil?"

"The time might come whan to confess even that would ease the hert; but in sic a case, the man's first duty, it seems to me, would be to watch for an opportunity o' deein' that neighbour a kin'ness. Where a man, however, has done an injustice, an open wrong to a neighbour, he has no ch'ice but confess it: that neighbour is the one from whom he has to ask and receive forgiveness: he alone, if the offender can get at him, can lift the burden aff o' him! It is his duty, on anither possible gr'un' also, namely, that the blame be na laid at the door o' some innocent man. And the author o' nae offence can afford to forget," ended the soutar, "hoo the Lord said, 'There's nae thing happit-up, but it maun come to the licht'?"

Now what could have led the minister so near the truth of his own story, like the murderer

SALTED WITH FIRE

who haunts the proximity of the loudest witness to his crime, except the will of God working in him to set him free, I do not know; but he went on, driven by an impulse he neither understood nor suspected: —

“Suppose the thing not known, however, or likely to be known, and that the man’s confession, instead of serving any good end, could only destroy his reputation and usefulness, and bring bitter grief upon those who loved him, and nothing but shame to the one he had wronged — what would you say then? You will please to remember, Mr. MacLear, that I am putting an entirely imaginary case, and for the sake of argument only.”

“Eh, but I doobt — I doobt yer imaignary case!” murmured the soutar to himself, hardly daring even to think his thought clearly, lest somehow it should reveal itself. “Even then,” he replied, “it seems to me the offender maun cast about him for ane he can trust, and to him reveal the hail affair, that he may get help to see and do what’s richt about it. It mak’s an unco difference upon a thing to luik at it throuw anither man’s een, i’ the licht o’ anither man’s conscience! hae caused sair evil, that is, mair injustice, nor the man himsel’ kens? And what’s the reputation ye speak o’, or what’s the eesefu’-ness o’ sic a man worth? Isna his hoose biggit

SALTED WITH FIRE

upon the leein' sand? What kin' a usefulness can that be that has for its foundation hypocrisy? Awa' wi' 't a'thegither. Let him flee frae the pooer o' 't! Lat him destroy 't! Lat him cry oot to a' the warl, 'I am a worm, and no man!' Lat him cry oot to his Maker, 'I am a beast afore thee! Lat me dee, gien sae thoo wull, but deliver my sowl by this my confession'!"

As the soutar spoke, overcome by sympathy with the sinner, whom he could not help feeling in bodily presence before him, the minister stood listening with a face pale as death, pale with a deadly fear of shame.

"For God's sake, minister," went on the soutar, "gien ye hae ony sic thing upo' yer min', mak' haste and oot wi' 't. I dinna say *to me*, but to somebody. Mak' a clean breist o' 't, afore the Adversary has ye again by the thrapple!"

But here started up in the minister the pride of conscious superiority in station and learning: what a liberty taken by a shoemaker from whom he had just ordered a pair of boots! He drew himself up to his lanky height, and made reply:—

"I am not aware, Mr. MacLear, that I have given you any pretext for addressing me in such terms. As I told you, I was putting a case, a very possible one, indeed, but not the less a merely imaginary one! But you have made me

SALTED WITH FIRE

see how unsafe it is to enter into any argument on a supposed case with one of limited education and outlook! It is my own fault, however, and I beg your pardon for having thoughtlessly led you into such a blunder! Good morning!"

As the door closed behind the parson, he began to felicitate himself on having so happily turned aside the course of their conversation, of which he now first recognised the dangerous drift; but he little thought how much he had already conveyed to a mind and observation so well schooled in the symptoms of human unrest.

"I must set a better watch over my thoughts," he said to himself, "lest they betray me!" thus resolving to conceal himself yet more from the one man in the place who saw and would have cut for him the snare of the fowler.

"I was ower hasty," said the soutar on his part. "But I think the truth has ta'en some grup o' 'im. His conscience is waukin' up, I fancy, and growlin' a bit; and whaur that dog has ance a haud, he's no ready to lowsen or lat it gang! We maun jist lie quaiet a bit, and see! His hoor 'ill come!"

The minister, being one who turned pale in his anger, walked home with a face of such corpse-like whiteness, that a woman who met him said to herself, "What can ail the minis-

SALTED WITH FIRE

ter, bonny laad! He's luikin' as scared as a corp! That fule body, the soutar, 's been angerin' him wi' his havers!"

The first thing he did, notwithstanding, was to turn to the chapter and verse the soutar had indicated, which through all his mental commotion had, rather oddly, remained unruffled in his memory — only to find, however, that the passage suggested nothing out of which he could fabricate a sermon. How could it be otherwise with one who was quite content to have God nearer him than a merely adoptive father! He found at the same time that his late interview had rendered the machinery of his thought-factory no fitter than before for the weaving of a tangled wisp of loose ends into the homogeneous web of a sermon; and at last found himself driven to his old stock of carefully preserved preordination sermons, where he was specially unhappy in his choice of one least of all fitted to awake comprehension or interest in his audience.

His selection made, and the rest of the day clear for inaction, he wrote a letter. Ever since his fall he had been successfully practising the throwing of sops straight into one or other of the throats of the triple-headed Cerberus, his conscience, which was more clever in catching them than they were in choking the said howler;

SALTED WITH FIRE

and one of such sops, the said letter, was the result of his talk with the soutar. Addressed to an old divinity classmate, it was mere *gowk-spittle*, with the question inside it for core of the spittle — whether his friend had ever heard of the little girl — he could just remember the name and pretty face of her — Isy, general slavey to her aunt's lodgers in the Canongate, of whom he was one: he had often wondered, he said, what had become of her, for he had been almost in love with her for half a year at Deemouth; and I cannot but take the enquiry as a mere pretence, with the object of deceiving himself into the notion that he had made at least one attempt to discover her. His friend forgot to answer his question, and Blatherwick never reminded him of it.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XX

NEVER dawned Sunday upon soul more wretched. He had not, indeed, to climb into his watchman's tower without the pretence of a proclamation, but on that very morning his father had put the mare between the shafts of the gig to drive his wife to Tiltbowie, and their son's church, instead of one in the next parish, nearer and more accessible, where they were oftener the way of going. And it is not wonderful that they should have found themselves so dissatisfied with the spiritual food laid before them, as to wish heartily that they had remained at home, or driven to the nearer church. The moment the service was over, Mr. Blatherwick felt even more than inclined to drive home without waiting for an interview with James; for there was no remark he could make on the sermon that would be pleasant either for his son or his wife to hear; but Marion combated his resolve with entreaties that grew even angry, until at last Peter was compelled to give sullenly in, and they waited in the churchyard for his appearance.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Weel, Jamie,” said his father, shaking hands with him limply, for, though for different reasons, both their hearts were full of conscious discomfort, “yon was a dish o’ some steeve parritch ye gied us this mornin’! In fac’ the meal itsel’ was baith auld and soor!”

The mother said not a word, but gave her son a pitiful smile; and he, haunted by the taste of failure which his sermon had left in his own mouth, and troubled as well by sub-conscious motions of a gradually waking self-recognition, found it scarce possible to look his father in the face, feeling as if he had been just rebuked by him before all the congregation.

“Father,” he said, “you do not know how difficult it is to preach a fresh sermon every Sunday!”

“Ca’ ye yon fresh, Jamie? It was mair like the fuistit husks o’ the half-faimisht swine! Man, I wuss sic provender would drive yersel’ whaur there’s better and to spare! Ye canna help kenning yon for neither brose nor stourum!”

James made a wry face, and the sight of his annoyance broke the thin ice that had gathered over the wellspring in his mother’s heart; for a brief moment the minister was her boy again. But he gave her no filial response; his own ambition, and the praise of worthy men, had blocked the natural movements of the divine

SALTED WITH FIRE

in him, and turned aside his wholesomest impulses. He received, however, the conviction that his parents had never had any sympathy with his preaching, and this reacted in a sudden cold flow of resentment, and a thickening of the ice between them. Some fundamental shock must surely be necessary to unsettle and dislodge that overmastering ice, if ever his wintered heart was to feel the power of a reviving spring!

The whole threesum family stood in forced silence for a few moments; then the father said to the mother, —

“ I doobt we maun be settin’ oot for hame ! ”

“ Will you not come into the manse, and have something before you go ? ” answered James, not without anxiety lest his housekeeper should be taken at unawares, and annoyed by their acceptance; he lived in constant dread of offending her, for he feared her searching eyes.

“ Na, I thank ye, ” returned his father: “ it wad taste o’ stew ! ” (*blown dust.*)

It was a rude remark; but Peter was not in a kind mood; and when love itself is unkind, it is burning and bitter and merciless. Marion burst into tears. James turned away, and walked home with a gait of wounded dignity. Peter went to interrupt with the bit the mare’s feed of oats by the churchyard gate. His wife saw

SALTED WITH FIRE

his hands tremble pitifully as he put the head-stall over the creature's ears, and reproached herself that she had given him such a cold-hearted son. She climbed in a helpless way into the gig, and sat waiting for her husband to take his place beside her, which he did with the remark, —

“I'm that drowthy I could drink cauld watter!”

They drove away from the place of tombs, but carried death with them, and left the sunlight behind them.

Neither spoke a word all the way — not until she was dismounting at their own door, did the mother venture even the remark, “Eh, sirs!” which meant a world of unexpressed and inexpressible misery. She went straight up to the little garret where she kept her Sunday bonnet, and used to say her prayers when in especial misery, and thence, having placed the venerated adornment in the sacred chest, went to her bedroom, where she washed her face, and prepared to encounter the dinner Isy had got ready for them — hoping to hear something about the sermon, perhaps even some little word about the minister himself. But Isy, too, must share in the disappointment of that glorious Sunday morning. Not a word passed between the two. Their son was the shepherd, indeed, but rather

SALTED WITH FIRE

the keeper of the sheepfold than of the sheep. Over the church he was very careful that it should be properly swept and sometimes even garnished, but of the temple of the Holy Ghost, the hearts of his sheep, he knew nothing! The gloom of his parents, their sense of failure and loss, grew and grew all the dull hot afternoon, until to both of them it seemed almost to pass their power of endurance. At last, however, it abated, as does every pain, for life is at its root; thereto ordained, it slew itself by exhaustion. "But," said the mother to herself, "there's Monday comin', and what am I to do!" For she felt that with the new day would return the old trouble, the gnawing, sickening pain that she was childless — her daughter gone, and no son left. None the less, however, when the new day came, it brought with it its own new possibility of living yet one day more.

But the minister, although he did not know it, was much more to be pitied than those whose misery he was. All night long he had slept with a sense of ill-usage sub-lying his consciousness and dominating his dreams; but with the sun came a doubt whether he had not acted in a way unseemly when he turned and left his father and mother alone in the churchyard. Of course they had not treated him well; but what would any of his congregation — and some might have

SALTED WITH FIRE

happened to be lingering in the churchyard — think to have seen them part as they did? What would the scene have looked like? He did not answer himself, however, that it would have looked what it was, and justified a severe judgment on him! He thought only to take precaution against such a judgment.

When he had had his breakfast, he set out, his custom of a Monday morning after the fatigues of the Sunday, for what he called a quiet stroll, but his thoughts would keep returning, and that with ever fresh resentment, to the souter's insinuation — for such he counted it — on the Saturday; when suddenly, all uninvited, and displacing the mental phantasm of her father, arose before him that of Maggie, as he had seen her turn from him that same Saturday morning with an embarrassed flush; and with it the sudden question, What baby was it on which she seemed so constantly to spend her devotion? he had never heard of brother or sister! and it would be strange were there such a difference of age between them! Could it be Maggie herself made a slip? With the idea arose in him a certain satisfaction in the possible prospect of learning that this man, so ready to believe evil of his neighbour, had not succeeded in keeping his own house undefiled. He rebuked himself the next moment, it is true, in a mild fashion,

SALTED WITH FIRE

for harbouring even the ghost of satisfaction in the wrong-doing of another: it was rejoicing in iniquity unbefitting the pastor of a Christian flock! It was, however, he said, for himself only, but presently he pardoned a passing thought, against whose entrance he had not been warned in time! But it came and came again, and he took no continuous trouble to cast it out. When he returned from his walk, he warily asked his housekeeper about the little one, but she only shook her head knowingly, as if she knew more than she chose to tell. It shows how little he had moved among his flock that he had never heard how the child came to be in the soutar's house.

After his early dinner, he thought it would be well to forgive his parents and call at Stonecross: that would tend to wipe out any undesirable conclusion their hurried parting might have left on the minds of his parents, and to prevent any breath of gossip from injuring him in his sacred profession! He had not been to see them for a long time; and although such visits gave him no satisfaction, he never dreamed of attributing it to his own want of cordiality, while he judged it well to avoid any appearance of evil, and therefore thought it his duty to pay them a hurried call about once a month. Now, upon reflection, he saw it must be nearly three

SALTED WITH FIRE

months since last he had been at the place, but he excused himself because of the distance, and his not being a good walker! Even now he was in no haste to set out, and had a long snooze in his armchair first; so that it was the evening when he climbed the hill and came in sight of the low gable behind which he was born.

Isy was in the garden gathering up the linen she had spread to dry on the gooseberry bushes, when his head came in sight at the top of the brae. She knew him at once, and, stooping behind the bushes, fled to the back of the house, and so away to the moor. James saw the white flutter of a sheet, but nothing of her who took it, neither heard any allusion to her presence at the farm. He had, indeed, heard that his mother had a very nice young woman to help her in the house, but he had so little interest in home-affairs that the news waked in him no curiosity.

Ever since she came, Isy had been on the outlook lest James should unexpectedly surprise her, and be surprised into an unwitting disclosure of his relation to her; and not even by the long deferring of her hope to see him yet again, had she come to pretermitt her vigilance; for the longer he delayed, the more certain it became that he must soon appear. She had not

SALTED WITH FIRE

intended to avoid him altogether, only not to startle him into any unintentional recognition of her in the presence of his mother. But when she saw him approaching the house, her courage failed her, and she fled to avoid the danger of betraying both herself and him. She was, in truth, ashamed of meeting him, feeling guiltily exposed to his just reproaches. All the time he remained with his mother, she kept watching the house, nor once showed herself until he was gone, when she reappeared as if just returned from roaming the moor. Her mistress imagined she still indulged the hope of there finding her baby, whose very existence the elder woman doubted, taking it for nothing but a half crazy survival from the time of her insanity before the Robertsons found her.

The minister made a comforting peace with his mother, telling her a part of the truth, namely, that he had been much out of sorts during the week, and quite unable to write a new sermon, so had been driven at the very last to take an old one so hurriedly that he failed to recall correctly the subject and nature of it, which he soon but too late found to be altogether unsuitable, and that at a moment fatal to his equanimity, when, discovering his parents in the congregation, he was so dismayed

SALTED WITH FIRE

that he lost his self-possession, and from that ensued his apparent lack of cordiality. It was a lame excuse, but served to silence, if not to satisfy, his mother at least. His father was out of doors, and he did not see him.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XXI

As time went on, the terror of discovery grew rather than abated in the mind of the minister. He did not know whence or why it was so, for no news of Isy reached him, and in his cooler moments he felt almost certain she could not have passed so completely out of sight and hearing if she were still in the world. When most persuaded of this, he felt ablest to live and forget the past, of which indeed, blotted as it was with a dangerous wrong, he could recall no portion with satisfaction, while its darkness and silence gave it a threatening aspect, out of which any moment might burst the hidden enemy, the thing that might, and must not be known: the thought was torture. At the same time he felt that, having done nothing to hide the miserable fact, neither now would he do anything to keep it secret; he would leave all to that Providence which seemed hitherto to have wrought on his behalf; while he himself only kept a silence which no gentleman must break! And why should that come abroad which Providence itself concealed? Who had

SALTED WITH FIRE

any claim to know a mere passing fault, which the partner in it must least of all desire exposed, seeing it would fall heavier upon her than upon him? Where then could be the call for confession, about which the soutar maundered so? If, on the other hand, the secret should threaten to creep out, he would not, he flattered himself, move a finger to retain over it the veil of concealment: he would, on the contrary, that moment disappear in some trackless solitude, rejoicing that the truth was known, and that he had nothing left to wish hidden! As to the charge of hypocrisy that was sure to follow such discovery, he was innocent: he had never said anything he did not believe; he had made no professions but such as were involved in his position; never once had he posed as a man of Christian experience — like the soutar, for instance! Simply and only he had been overtaken in a fault: he never repeated, would never repeat it; and was willing to atone for it in any way he could! It must be remembered for him that he was altogether in the dark as to the existence of the little one.

Upon the Saturday after the minister's visit to his parents, the soutar had been hard at work all day long finishing the new boots which the minister had ordered of him, and which indeed he had almost forgotten in his anxiety about

SALTED WITH FIRE

him for whom he had to make them. For Mac-Lear was now thoroughly convinced that the young man had "some sick offence within his mind," and was the more anxious to finish his boots in time to carry them home the same night, that he knew his words had increased the sickness of that offence, and that he would not be sorry if opportunity occurred for keeping that same sickness alive, seeing it was the one form that returning health could take. Nothing attracted the souter more than a chance of doing anything to lift from a human soul, were it but a single fold of the darkness that compassed it, and so let the light nearer to the troubled heart. At the same time, as to what it might be that was harassing the minister's soul, he sternly repressed all curiosity, and indeed suspected nothing of what lay festering there. He had no desire that he should unbosom himself to him, but hoped what he said would send him to seeking counsel of some one who could help him, and that, his displeasure gradually passing, he would resume his friendly intercourse with himself, for somehow there was that in the gloomy parson which powerfully attracted the cheery and hopeful souter, who set down his troubled abstraction to the hunger of his heart after a spiritual good he had not begun to find; he could not, he thought, under-

SALTED WITH FIRE

stand the good news about God, — that he was to all his children just what Jesus seemed to them that saw God in his countenance; he could not have learned from Jesus much of the truth about God, for it seemed to make in him no gladness, no power of life, no strength to be: for him he had not risen, but lay wrapt in the mummy-cloths, where the women had succeeded in embalming him; and the larks and the angels were both mistaken in singing as they did!

At such an hour as made the soutar doubt whether the housekeeper might not have retired for the night, he rang the bell of the manse-door, and brought the minister himself from his study to confront him with the new boots in his hand on the other side of the threshold.

In the meantime, James Blatherwick had come to see that his late attempt at communication with the soutar had exposed him to a not unnatural suspicion, and was now bent on removing the unfortunate impression his words might have made. Wishing therefore to appear to cherish no offence because of his parishioner's appeal to him when last they parted, and thus to obliterate any notion that a confession lurked behind his repented words, he addressed him with the *abandon* which, gloomy in spirit as he now habitually was, he had yet

SALTED WITH FIRE

learned to assume in a moment when the masking instinct was roused in him.

"Oh, Mr. MacLear," he said jocularly, "I am glad you have just managed to escape breaking the Sabbath! You have had a close shave! It wants about ten minutes, hardly more, to the awful hour!"

"I doobt, sir, it would hae broken the Sabbath waur, to fail o' my word for the sake o' a steak or twa, that maiters naething to God or man," returned the soutar.

"Ah, well, we won't argue about it; but if we were inclined to be strict, the Sabbath began some" — here he looked at his watch — "some five hours and three-quarters ago, that is, at six of the clock, Saturday evening!"

"Hoot, minister, ye ken ye're wrang there, for, Jew-wise, it began at sax o' the Friday night! But ye hae made it plain frae the poopit that ye hae nae supperstition about the first day o' the week, which alane has aucht to do wi' us Christians! We're no a' Jews, though there's a heap o' them upo' this side o' the Tweed; and I for ane confess nae obligation but to drap workin' and sit doon wi' clean han's, or as clean as I can weel mak' them, to the speeritual table o' the Lord, whan I aye try also to weir a cheerfu' and clean face — as far as the sermon will permit, and there's aye a pyke o' mate

SALTED WITH FIRE

samewhaur intill 't! For isna it the bonny day whan the Lord wad hae us sit doon and eat wi' himsel', wha made the heavens and the earth, and the waters under the earth that haud it up? Didna he rise this day, and poor oot the gran' reid wine, and say, 'Sit ye doon, bairns, and tak' o' my best'?"

"Ay, ay, Mr. MacLear, that 's a fine way to think of the Sabbath!" rejoined the minister, "and the very way I'm in the habit of thinking of it myself. — I'm greatly obliged to you for bringing home my boots; but indeed I could have managed very well without them!"

"Ay, sir, maybe; I dinna doobt ye hae pairs enuch for that, but ye see I couldna do *wi'oot* them, for I had *promised*."

The word struck the minister to the heart. "He means it!" he said to himself. "But I never promised the girl anything! I could not have done it! I never thought of such a thing! I am not bound by anything I said!"

He never saw or said to himself that, whether he had promised or not, his deed had bound him more absolutely than could any words.

All this time he was letting the soutar stand on the doorstep, with the new boots in his hand.

"Come in," he said at last, "and put them there in the window. It's about time we were

SALTED WITH FIRE

all going to bed, I think, — especially me, the morn being preaching-day!”

The soutar betook himself to his home and to bed, sorry that he had said nothing, yet having said more than he knew.

The next evening he listened to the best sermon he had yet heard from that pulpit, — a résumé of the facts bearing on the resurrection of our Lord, with which sermon, however, a large part of the congregation was anything but pleased, because the minister admitted the impossibility of reconciling in every particular the differing accounts of the doings and seeings of those who witnessed it.

“As if,” said the soutar, “the Lord wasna to shaw himsel’ openly till a’ that saw the thing were agreed as to their recollection o’ what they saw!”

He himself went home edified and uplifted by the fresh contemplation of the story of his Master’s victory, whose pains were over at last, and he through death lord for ever over death and evil, over pain and loss and fear, who was already, through his Father, lord of creation and life, and all things, visible and invisible, lord of all thinking and feeling and judgment, able to give repentance and restoration and recovery, and to set right all that self-will had set wrong. The heart of his humble disciple re-

SALTED WITH FIRE

joined in him. Indeed he scandalised the reposing Sabbath-street by breaking out as he went home into a somewhat unmelodious song, singing, "They are all gone down to hell with the weapons of their war!" to a tune nobody knew but himself, and which he could never have sung again. "O Faithful and True," he broke out again as he reached his own door; but stopped suddenly, saying, "Tut, tut, the fowk 'll think I hae been drinkin'! — Eh," he said to himself as he went in, "gien I nicht but ance hear the name that no man kennet but himsel'!"

The next day he was very tired, and felt it would be quite right to take a holiday, although it was one of the six days in which the old commandment enjoined him to labour and do all his work. So he took a large piece of oat-cake in his pocket, and, telling Maggie he was going to the hills "to do naething and a'thing, baith at ance, a' day," disappeared with a backward look and a lingering smile.

He went brimful of expectation, neither was disappointed in those he met by the way.

After walking some distance, however, in quiescent peace, and having since noontide met no one — to use his own fashion of speech — by which he meant that no individual thought had arisen in his mind, for he always was ready to regard a thought that came suddenly, with-

SALTED WITH FIRE

out his having looked for or invited its approach, as a word direct from the First Thought into his. He bethought him of Peter Blatherwick, whom he had known for many years, and honoured as a genuine Nathaniel, a man without guile; and not having seen him now for a long time, it was with a rush of pleasure and confidence that he thought of him again, and the desire to see him came upon him. He had left the farm far behind, but he turned at once his face and his feet toward Stonecross; for the farmer's true face was one he was sure of meeting in the kingdom of heaven; and now first he became aware of a special reason for wishing to see him; he had caught a sight of him and his wife as they stood in the churchyard after James's disappointing sermon, and could not help seeing that neither had profited by it; and now he rejoiced in the thought of making them share in the pleasure and benefit he had gathered from the sermon of yesterday evening. He went as a messenger of good tidings, a witness to the quality of the food their son then laid before the sheep he was appointed to feed. His eagerness to see his friend increased as he approached his dwelling, and, having knocked at the door, stood attending on its opening.

To his surprise, the farmer came himself to the door, and stood there in silence, with a look

SALTED WITH FIRE

that seemed to say, "I know you; but what can you be wanting of me?" His face looked troubled, and not merely sorrowful, but scared. Usually ruddy with health and calm with content, it was now blotted with white shadows, and seemed, as he held the door-handle without a welcome, that of one who was aware of something unseen behind him.

"What can ail ye, Mr. Blatherwick?" asked the souter in a voice that faltered with sympathetic anxiety. "Surely — I houp there 's naething come ower the mistress!" — for how could less than mishap to her make her husband look like that?

"Na, I thank ye; she 's vera weel; but a dreid thing has befa'en her and me. It 's little mair nor an hoor sin syne 'at oor Isy — ye maun hae h'ard tell o' Isy, that we baith had sic a fawoour for — a' at ance she jist drappit doon deid, as gien shotten wi' a gun. In fac' I thought for a meenut, though I h'ard nae shot, that sic had been the case. The ae meenut she stude talkin' to her mistress i' the kitchen, and the next she was in a heap on the flure o' 't! — But come in, come in."

"Eh, the bonny lassie!" cried the shoemaker, without moving to enter; "I min' upo' her weel, though I think I never saw her but ance! — a fine, delicat' pictur' o' a lassie, that

SALTED WITH FIRE

luikit at ye as gien she made ye kin'ly welcome to onything she could gie or get for ye!"

"Aweel, as I'm telling ye," said the farmer, "she 's awa'; and we'll see her no more till the earth gies up her deid. The wife's in there wi' what 's left o' her, greitin' as gien she wad greit oot her een. Eh, but she lo'ed her weel! Doon she drappit, and never a moment to say her prayers!"

"That matters na muckle, — no a hair, in fac'!" returned the soutar. "It was the Father o' her, nane ither, that took her. He wantit her hame; and he's no ane to dee onything ill, or at the wrang moment! Gien a meenut mair had been ony guid till her, thinkna ye she would hae had that meenut?"

"Willna ye come in and see her? Some fowk canna bide to luik upo' the deid, but ye canna be ane o' sic!"

"Na; it's trowth I daurna be nane o' sic. I s' gang wi' ye to luik upo' the face o' ane 'at 's won throuw richt wullingly — though the leev-
ing coontenance maun aye be a heap bonnier, bein' mair like to the Son o' Man, the first and the last, that can never dee!"

"Come awa', than; and maybe the Lord 'ill gie ye a word o' comfort for her mistress, for she tak's on terrible aboot her. It jist braks my hert to see her!"

SALTED WITH FIRE

“The hert o’ king or cobbler’s i’ the han’ o’ the Lord,” answered the soutar solemnly, “and gien my hert indite onything, my tongue ’ill be ready to speyk the same.”

He followed the farmer, who trode softly, as if he feared disturbing the sleeper, upon whom even the sudden silences of the world would break no more.

Mr. Blatherwick led the way to the parlour, and through it to a closet behind, used as a guest-chamber when used at all. There, on a little white bed with white dimity curtains, drawn entirely back, as if still a hope was cherished of her revival from what at first they supposed a swoon, lay the form of Isobel. The eyes of the soutar, in whom had lingered yet a hope, at once, although not unaccustomed to the face of the dead, concluded that she was indeed gone to return no more. Her lovely little face, although its light was departed, and its beautiful eyes were closed, was even lovelier than before. Her arms and hands lay straight by her sides, as if their work was gone from them, and nothing left for them to do, neither would any voice again call Isy. Now she might sleep on and take her rest!

“I had but to lay them straucht,” sobbed her mistress; “her een she had closed hersel’ as she drappit — deid at my vera feet! Eh, but

SALTED WITH FIRE

she *was* a bonny lassie — and a guid, naething less nor a dother to me!”

“And a dother to me as weel!” supplemented Peter, with a burst of dry sobbing.

“And no ance had I paid her a penny wage!” exclaimed Marion, with a sudden remorseful reminiscence as of a wrong she had done her.

“She never wantit it — and never wull noo — or ance think o’ wages! We’ll e’en han’ them ower to the hospital, and that’ll ease yer min’, Marion!” said the more practical Peter.

“Eh, she was a dacent, mensefu’, richt lo’able cratur!” cried Marion. “She never *said* naething to jeedge by, but I hae a glimmer o’ houp she *may* ha’ been ane o’ the Lord’s ain.”

“Is that a’ ye can say, mem?” interposed the soutar. “Sure ye widna daur imaigine her drappit oot o’ his han’s!”

“Na,” returned Marion; “but I wad richt fain ken her weel intill them! and wha is there to assure us she had the needfu’ faith i’ the atonement?”

“’Deed, I carena, mem! I houp she had faith i’ naither thing nor thought but the Lord himsel’! Alive or deid, we’re in his han’s wha dee’d for us, revealin’ his Father,” said the soutar; “and gien she didna ken him afore, she wull noo! The holy All-in-all be wi’ her

SALTED WITH FIRE

i' the dark, or whatever comes first!—O God, haud up her heid, and latna the watters gang ower her!”

Anti-Theology rose, dull, rampant, and indignant; but the solemn face of the dead interdicted dispute, and love was ready to hope, if not quite to believe. Nevertheless, to those guileless two, the words of the soutar sounded like blasphemy: was not her fate settled for ever? Had not death in a moment turned her into an immortal angel or an equally immortal devil? Only how, at such a moment, with the peaceful face before them, were they to argue the possibility that she, the loving, the gentle, whose fault they knew only by her confession, was now as utterly disregarded by the God of the living as if she had never been born? Was the same measure, thought the soutar, to be meted to her as to him that betrayed the Holy One in the garden of his prayers? Would it have been better for her, too, that she had never been born? Therefore no one spoke; and the soutar, after gazing on her image for a while, prayer overflowing in his heart but never reaching his lips, turned slowly, and departed without a word.

Reaching home long before his Maggie expected him, he told her of the blow that had fallen upon the good people of Stonecross. Maggie clasped her baby to her bosom, and

SALTED WITH FIRE

was silent; she had never even seen the young woman, and had never once thought of her and the baby together.

Just ere he reached his own door, however, he met the parson, whom, then first remembering with what object he had gone to pay his parents a visit, he told of the condition in which he had found and left them, adding that very plainly they were in sore need of what sympathy it might be in his power to show them, he so representing the shock they had received and the bitterness of their grief, that the young minister, although he marvelled at their being in such trouble about the death of merely a servant, was roused to the duty of his profession; and although his heart had never yet drawn him either to the house of mourning or of mirth, he judged it becoming to call again at Stonecross, and the rather, perhaps, that on the occasion of his last visit neither had his father left his work when he heard he was in the house, nor had James gone to the next field where his father was. It pleased the souter that he had faced about in the street, and, without going in the direction of the manse, started immediately for the farm, with a quicker stride than, since his return to Tiltbowie as its minister, he had seen him put on.

James had never encountered Isobel at his

SALTED WITH FIRE

father's house, and had not the smallest anticipation of whose face he was about to meet after a separation so long. Had he foreseen what was awaiting him, I cannot even conjecture the feeling with which he would have approached the house, whether one of compunction, or one of relief from a haunting sense of danger, without which, revived and deepened by her reappearance at Deemouth, he would probably by this time have all but forgotten "the unfortunate accident" from whose possible results Providence seemed hitherto to have protected him. Utterly unconscious, then, of the shock toward which he was rushing, he hurried on with a faint pleasure at the thought of seeing his mother, and having something because of which to assume the superiority of expostulation with her. Toward his father, had he ever examined his consciousness, he would have been aware of a dim feeling of disapproval, if not of repugnance. His emotional condition toward him, if indeed in some measure an unusual one, was by no means an exceptional or solitary case: there are many in the world who have not yet learned to love, still less to trust their parents, and whose hearts are even now waiting to surprise them, in a mode they cannot foresee because incapable of understanding it. James Blatherwick was one of those, probably

SALTED WITH FIRE

few, whose sluggish natures require, for the melting of their stubbornness and their remoulding into forms of strength and beauty, such a concentration of the love of God as takes the shape of a consuming fire.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XXII

THE night had fallen when he reached the farm. The place was silent; the doors were all shut, and when he opened the nearest, seldom used but for the reception of strangers, and walked in, not a soul was to be seen. No one came to meet him, for no one had even thought of or desired his coming. He went into the parlour, and there, from the little chamber beyond, whose door stood wide open, appeared his mother. Her heart big with grief, she clasped him in her arms, and laid her cheek against his bosom; higher she could not reach, and nearer to him than his breast-bone she could not come. No endearment had ever been natural to James; he had never encouraged or missed any, neither knew how to receive such when perforce it manifested itself.

“I am distressed, mother,” he began, “to see you so upset, and cannot help thinking such a display of feeling unnecessary, and, if I may say so, unreasonable. You cannot, in such a brief period as this new maid of yours has been with you, have naturally developed such an affection

SALTED WITH FIRE

for her, as this — ” he hesitated for a word — “ as this *bouleversement* would seem to indicate ! The young woman can hardly be a relative, or I should have heard of her existence. The suddenness of the occurrence, of which I heard from my shoemaker, MacLear, must have wrought disastrously upon your nerves. Come, come, dear mother ! you must indeed compose yourself. It is quite unworthy of you, to yield to such paroxysms of unnatural and uncalled-for grief. Surely it is the part of a Christian like you to meet with calmness, especially in the case of one you have known so little, that inevitable change which neither man nor woman can avoid longer than a few years at most ! Of course, the appalling instantaneousness of it in the present case goes far to explain and excuse your emotion, but now at least, after so many hours have elapsed, it is time for reason to resume her sway, and for calmness to succeed storm ! Was it not Schiller who said, ‘ Death cannot be an evil, for it is universal ’ ? At all events, it is not an unmitigated evil ! ” he added — with a sigh, as if for his part he was prepared to welcome it.

During this prolonged and foolish speech, the gentle woman, whose mother-heart had loved the poor girl that bore her daughter’s name, had been restraining her sobs behind her handkerchief, but now, perhaps, it was a little wholesome anger

SALTED WITH FIRE

that woke as she listened to her son's cold commonplaces, and made her able to speak.

"Ye didna ken her, laddie," she cried, "or ye would never mint at layin' yer tongue upon her like that! — 'Deed, na, ye wouldna! I doobt gien ever ye could hae come to ken as she was sic a bonny sowl as dwalt in yon white-faced, patient thing, lyin' i' the chaumer there, wi' the stang oot o' her hert at last, and left the sharper i' mine! But me and yer father, weel we likit her; for to hiz she was mair a dochter nor a servan', wi' a braw lovin' kin'ness no to be luikit for frae ony son, wha's but a man, and we never had frae ony lass but oor ain Isy! Jist gang ye intill the closet there, gien ye wull, and ye'll see something that'll maybe saften yer hert a bit, and lat ye un'erstan' what mak' o' a thing's come to the twa auld fowk ye never cared sae muckle about!"

James felt himself bitterly aggrieved by this personal allusion of his mother. How unfair she was to him! What had *he* ever done to offend her? He had always behaved himself properly, — except indeed that once when he had been betrayed into wrong, — of which, however, neither she, nor living soul else, knew anything, or would ever know. What right had she, then, to say such things to him? She had never done so before. Had he not fulfilled the expectations with which his father sent him to college?

SALTED WITH FIRE

Had he not gained a position the reflected splendour of which would always crown them the parents of James Blatherwick? She was behaving very ill to him, showing him none of the consideration and respect he had so justly earned, but never demanded of them. He rose suddenly, and with scarce a thought save to escape from his mother in a way that must manifest his displeasure, left the room, and walked heedlessly into the little chamber, and the presence of the more heedless dead.

The night had fallen, but the small window of the room looked westward, and a bar of golden light yet lay like a resurrection stone over the spot where the sun was buried. A pale sad gleam, softly vanishing, hovered, hardly rested, upon the lovely, still, unlooking face, that lay white on the scarcely whiter pillow. Coming out of the darker room, the sharp, low light blinded him a little, and he saw without any certainty of perception, yet seemed to have something before him altogether unfamiliar, giving him a sense of something he had known once, perhaps yet ought to know, but had forgotten; the truth concerning it seemed hidden by the strange autumnal light, which yet alone revealed it. Concluding himself oddly affected by the sight of a room he had regarded with some awe in his childhood, and had not set foot in for so long,

SALTED WITH FIRE

he drew, almost unconsciously, a little nearer to the bed, to look closer at this paragon of servants whose loss caused his mother a sorrow so unreasonably poignant. The sense of something known grew stronger. Not even yet did he recognise the death-changed countenance, but he knew now that he *had* seen that still face before, and knew also that, were she but for one moment to open those eyes, he would know who she was. Then the truth flashed upon him; it was — Good God, *could* it be the dead face of Isy? It was the merest nonsensical fancy! Nothing but an illusion of the light and darkness that would not mingle properly! In the daylight he could never have been so befooled. How could his imagination have played so false a game with him! Strange that he should just once be so mis-served by a mind of unshakable sanity like his! He had always prided himself on the clearness, both physical and mental, with which he saw everything. Still, his foolish imagination had power enough to fix him where he stood, gazing on what was only like, and could not be the same: he could not turn and go from it. Why did he not by mere will force himself out of the room? Was it only repugnance to encounter again the unbecoming tears of his mother that held him paralysed? He could not stir a foot, but stared and stood. And

SALTED WITH FIRE

as he kept looking, the dead face grew upon him, and kept telling him who she was, — grew more and more like the only girl whom in any sense he had ever loved. If it was not she, how could the dead look so like the living he had once known and loved? At length what doubt was left changed at once to the assurance that this was indeed all that he had known of the girl whom now he could know no more! And — dare I say it? — it was but a sense of relief the assurance brought him. He breathed a sigh of such peace as he had not known since his sin, and with that sigh — which let my reader interpret as he sees fit — left the room. Passing his mother, who still wept in the deeper dusk of the parlour, with the observation that there was no moon, and it would be quite dark before he reached the manse, he bade her good-night, and went out.

When Peter, who, unable to sit longer inactive, had gone to attend to something in stable or byre, now re-entered the room, and sat down beside his wife, she began to talk about the funeral preparations, and the persons to be invited. But such grief overtook him afresh, that even his wife was surprised at the depth of her husband's feeling over the loss of Isy, who was no relative. He could scarcely endure listening to her; it seemed to him indelicate and

SALTED WITH FIRE

even heartless to talk of burying one so dear who was but just gone from their sight. It was not the custom of the country to shorten the time of the dead above ground; unnecessary dispatch was a lack of reverence!

“What for sic a hurry?” said Peter. “Isna there time eneuch to put oot o’ yer sicht ane ye hae lo’ed sae weel, and luikit upon sae lang wi’ by ord’nar’ content? Lat me be the nicht; the morn ’ill be time eneuch. Rest my sowl wi’ deith, and haud awa’ wi’ yer funeral. ‘Sufficient untill the day,’ ye ken!”

“Eh, dear! I’m no like you, Peter! Whan the sowl’s gane, I tak’ no content i’ the presence o’ the puir worthless body, luikin’ what it never mair can be! But be it as ye wull, my ain man! It’s a sair hert ye hae as weel as me this nicht, and we maun beir ane anither’s burdens! The dautie may lie as we hae laid her, the nicht throuw, and naething said. There’s no need for ony to watch her; tyke nor baudrins ’ll never come near her. I hae aye won’ert what for fowk would sit up wi’ the deid: yet I min’ me weel they aye did i’ the auld time.”

In this alone she showed, however, that the girl they lamented was not their own daughter; for when the other Isy died, the body, although not so lovely to look upon as this, was never for a moment left alone while yet unveiled from the

SALTED WITH FIRE

eternal spaces, as if they feared she but slept, and, waking to find herself alone, might be terrified. Then, as if God had forgotten them, they seemed to forget God, for they went to bed without saying their usual evening-prayers together. I think, however, it was only that they fancied Isy gone beyond their prayers, and as they were not going to separate, they could, each apart, yet not the less together, pray as well in bed; and the coming of her son had been to Marion like the chill of a wandering iceberg at sea.

In the morning the farmer was, as usual, up the first, and, going into the death-chamber, sat down by the side of the bed, there remembering, he reproached himself, that he had forgotten "worship" the night before, when God himself had just reminded them that life and death were in his hands; if they had not consciously murmured against him, they had forgotten his love, and had not acknowledged his care!

And as he sat, thus reproaching himself as he looked at the white face, he became aware of a fact he had not noted before, — that upon the lips, otherwise plainly dead, was a little tinge of colour, also, possibly, a fainter — the faintest tinge, of which he could be nowise certain, in the cheek. He knew it must be a fancy, or at best an accident without significance, — for had he not heard before that such a thing

SALTED WITH FIRE

sometimes happened? Still, if his eyes were but deceiving him with an appearance he would so gladly have hailed, he yet shrank from the thought of hiding away the form so long as it retained even such a counterfeit appearance of life. Possibly the widow of Nain might have fancied such signs of life in her son ere the Lord of life drew near who was to stop his funeral; and just such the little daughter of Jairus might have looked when the wailing friends laughed *him* to scorn who was about to give her back to her parents. But now the age of miracles was long over, and death was death beyond remedy. Their own Isy died, and Jesus never raised *her* from the dead, but let them cover her with the cold green sod. Oh, why was God farther away now than when his Son was on the earth? Did not men need him more now than when his Son was with them? It did not occur to him that Jesus, nearer to the Father, could not be farther away from men, else could he never, by being with them, bring the Father nearer! And had He not brought all men nearer to each other, both the living and the dead? Was not at that moment the soul of the farmer nearer the soul of the shoemaker than ever before; for were not the two travelling upon lines converging to one centre? — “that they also may be one

SALTED WITH FIRE

in us, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee!" Peter Blatherwick was not yet capable of such reflections; but the soutar philosophised thus, though in humbler and more characteristic form of speech: God is a spirit, and everywhere all the same and always; but when the Son, who is one with the Father, came into new and perhaps nearer, anyhow different, relations with space and matter, and human life in them, who can say whether the Eternal himself was not thereby drawn also into new relations with the finite, to us of course unintelligible, and so, with his Son on the earth, might not be himself nearer to it than ever before, — nearer even than when the Son, by the will and power of his Father, was bringing all things into being? If so, and such new relation must be eternal? But whether or no, — and here I must reproduce his vernacular, — we maunna forget that he can and dis come nearer to ony leevin' soul than he could approach the bonniest lump o' leevin' clay that ever he shapit! That Son o' the Father could put on the form o' livin' man, and come oot and walk about amo' men, talkin' to them frae the very hert o' the Father; and yet, it seems to me, he can come closer still to ony livin' soul than ever he was even to that human body in the which he manifested himsel'. He can come nearer *to me*, I mean nearer to my

SALTED WITH FIRE

vera hert and min', than he can come to ony ither *kin'* o' thing that ever he made. — “ Oh, my God!” he broke out, “ lat me but ken thee near me, nearer than near, one wi' my life and bein', and I seek nae mair! The hert o' me can haud nae mair! I'm full to the brim! I'm complete! — Eh, my God, thoo art, and I am wi' thee, — a' made oot, and shinin' i' they licht!”

The farmer could not go very far with his friend in the path of the abstruse, though, being of childlike nature, those paths were open to him also ; no obstructing fence anywhere crossed them ; and as he grew, he would be able to go farther and farther, until the heaven of thought must at length open itself up to him, and he with the rest of the children run shouting through the gates of the city into regions which many a doctor of blessed divinity has not yet entered.

But to return to the Present. To Peter's eyes it seemed, I say, as if there lingered in the lips and on the cheeks of the girl a doubtful tinge of all but invisible colour, — of the spirit-like red of life. While that appearance, or the appearance rather of that appearance, was there, it would be too horrible to lay the form of her in the earth! And even if it were all a fancy of his own, as most likely it was, there was not,

SALTED WITH FIRE

therefore, any haste; it would be time enough to bury the form when other signs rendered it beyond dispute that the spirit was irrevocable!

Instead of going into the yard to make preparation toward the approaching harvest, he sat on with the dead, as if he could not leave her till his wife came to keep her company in his place. He brought a Bible from the next room, sat down again, and waited. His intention was to give his wife no hint, but wait how she saw; he would put to her no leading question, but watch for any start or touch of surprise that might show itself!

By and by his wife appeared, gazed a moment on the face of the dead, looked pitifully in her husband's countenance, and went out again wiping her eyes.

"She sees naething!" said Peter to himself. "I s' awa' to my wark! Still I winna hae her laid aside afore I'm a wheen surer o' what she is, — leevin' sowl or deid clod!"

He rose and went out. As he passed through the kitchen, his wife followed him to the door.

"Ye'll see and sen' a message to the vricht (*carpenter*) the day?" she whispered.

"Ow, ay, I'm no likely to forget!" he answered; "but there's nae hurry, seein' there's no life concert!"

"Na, nane, the mair's the pity," she answered;

SALTED WITH FIRE

and Peter knew, with a glad relief, that his wife was coming to herself.

Marion sent the cowboy to the Cormacks' cottage to tell Eppie to come to her.

The old woman came, heard what details there were to the sad story, shook her head, and found nothing to say. Together they prepared the body of Isy for its burial. Then the mind of Mrs. Blatherwick was at ease, and she waited a visit from the carpenter. But the carpenter did not come.

On the Thursday morning the soutar came to inquire after his friends at Stonecross, and the gudewife gave him a message to Willie Webster, the vricht, to hurry with the coffin.

But the soutar, catching sight of the farmer in the yard, went and had a talk with him; and the result was that the carpenter had no message. When Peter went in to his dinner, he still said to his wife that there was no hurry; why should she be so anxious to heap earth over the dead? For still he saw, or fancied he saw, the same possible colour on Isy's cheek, — like the faintest sunset-red, or what is either glow or pallor as you choose to think it, in the heart of the palest blush-rose. So the first week of Isy's death passed, and still she lay in state, that is, ready for the tomb.

Not a few of the neighbours came to see her, and were admitted where she lay; and some of

SALTED WITH FIRE

them warned Marion that, when the change came, it would come suddenly; but such was the face of the dead that Peter still would not hear of her being buried "with that colour on her cheek." And Marion had come to see, or to imagine with her husband that she saw it; and so they kept watching her in turn, and felt as if waiting to see whether the Lord were not going to work a miracle for them, and was not in the meantime only trying how long their hope and patience would endure.

The report spread through the neighbourhood, and reached Tiltbowie, where it pervaded street and lane: "The lass at Stanecross, she's lyin' deid, and luikin' as muckle alive as ever she was." From street and lane the people came crowding to see the strange sight, and were ready to overrun the whole house, but met with a reception by no means cordial. The farmer set men at every door, and would admit no one. Angry and ashamed, they all went away except a few of the more inquisitive, who continued lurking about the place in the hope of hearing something to carry home with them and enlarge upon.

As to the minister, he insisted upon disbelieving the whole thing, but could not help being made very uncomfortable by the report. Always such a foe to superstition that in his own mind he silently questioned the truth of

SALTED WITH FIRE

the record as to miracles in general, to whomsoever attributed, and for whatever reason, he was yet invaded by a fear which he dared not formulate. Of course, whatever, if anything, was taking place, it was no miracle, but the natural effect of causes entirely natural; none the less, however, did he dread the rumour. For a time he did not dare again to go near the place. If the girl was in a trance, might she not revive and mention his name? or might she not, even in her unconsciousness, say something to reveal her acquaintance with him, and lead to inquiry? This might be a case of catalepsy. Isy had always been a strange girl. She might come to herself entirely — and then? What if, indeed, she were kept alive that she might tell the truth, and disgrace him before all the world? In view of the possibility of her revival, might it not be well that he should himself be present at the moment? He might be some check upon her, or at least in some way influence what she said. At the least he would, by what she said, or by what she did not say, learn how to be on his guard. He would go at once to Stonecross and make inquiry after her. His mother, anyhow, would not be sorry to see him. In the meantime Peter had been growing more and more expectant, and had nearly forgotten all about the coffin, when a fresh rumour arose, and came,

SALTED WITH FIRE

well substantiated like most rumours, to the ears of William Webster, carpenter and builder of houses for the dead, that the young woman at Stonecross was indeed and unmistakably gone from this life; whereupon he, having long lost patience over the uncertainty which had so long crippled his operations, and never questioning the truth of the expected result, unwilling also to be hurried in what must next fall to his part, set at once to his task, and finished what he had many days before begun and half ended. That very night, indeed, on which the minister went to the farm, his man and he carried the coffin home, where, afraid by the gathering signs of an imminent storm, they stupidly set it up beside the first door, and, going to the other, told the deaf Eppie that there it was. She making them no intelligible reply, there they left it, leaning up against the wall, and went home, trusting all else to the men of the place. There the minister, when he came, saw it, and, entering with condolence on his lips, walked through the parlour to the little chamber, where he found his mother seated beside Isy, who still lay where and as he had left her on his former visit, while from the darkest corner came his father, and, to his astonishment, greeted him more cheerfully than usual. James cast a hurried, perplexed look on the face of the unburied dead, saw that

SALTED WITH FIRE

it seemed nowise changed, and held a bewildered peace.

“Isna this a most amazin’ thing, and houpfu’ as it’s amazin’?” said his father. “What *can* there be to come oot o’ ’t? Eh, the ways o’ the Almichty are trully no to be measured by mortal line! The lass maun surely be meant for marvellous things, to be dealt wi’ efter sic an extraord’nar’ fashion! Nicht efter nicht has the tane or the tither o’ us twa sitten here aside her, lattin’ the hairst tak’ its chance, and lea’in’ a’ to the men, me sleepin’ and they at their wark, and here has the bonny cratur been lyin’ as quaiet as gien she had never seen trouble, for thirteen days, and no change passed upon her, no more than on the three holy children i’ the fiery furnace! I’m jist a’ in a trimle to think o’ what’s to come o’ ’t! God only kens what he means to do; we can but sit still and wait for his appearance. What think ye, James? When the Lord was deid upo’ the cross, they waitit but twa nichts, and there he was up afore them! Here we hae waitit — this is the thirteent nicht — and naething to pruv even that she’s deid, still less ony sign that ever she’ll speyk word to us again! What think ye o’ ’t, man?”

“I greatly doubt, if she ever returns to life, that she’ll bring back her senses with her. Ye min’ the tale of the lady — Lady Fanshawe, I

SALTED WITH FIRE

• believe they ca'd her. She cam' till hersel' a richt i' the en'," said his mother.

"I don't remember hearing the story," said James.

"I min' naething aboot it," said his father, "and can think o' naething but the bonny lassie lyin' there afore me naither deid nor alive. I jist won'er, James, that ye're no as concernt, and as full o' doobt and even dreid as I am mysel'."

"We're in the hands of the God who created life and death," returned James, piously.

The father was silent.

"And he'll bring licht oot o' the vera dark o' the grave!" said the mother.

Her faith, or at least her hope, once set a-going, went farther than her husband's, and she had a greater power of waiting. Her son had sorely tried both her patience and her hope, and not even yet had she given up.

"Ye'll bide and share oor watch this ae nicht, Jeames?" said Peter. "It's an eldritch kin' o' a thing to wauk up i' the mirk mids o' the nicht wi' a deid corp aside ye! No 'at even yet I gie her up for deid, but I canna help feelin' some eerie like—not to say fleyt. Bide, man, and see the nicht oot wi' 's, and gie yer mither and me some hert o' grace."

James had no inclination to add another to

SALTED WITH FIRE

the party of three, which a silent one made ghastly, and began to murmur something about his housekeeper. But his mother cut him short with the indignant remark, —

“Hoot, what’s *she*? — neither mother nor wife nor sweetheart! She’s naething to you or ony o’ ’s! Lat her sit up for ye, gien she likes to tak’ the trouble. Lat her sit, I say, and tak’ never a thought about her!”

James had not a word to say. He must, greatly as he shrunk from the ordeal, encounter it without show of reluctance. He dared not even propose that he should sit in the kitchen and smoke. With better courage than will, he consented to share their vigil; if she should come to herself, there might be some advantage in his doing so, — not that in the least he expected, still less hoped for it: the very idea was frightful to him.

His mother went to prepare supper for them, and his father went out to have a glance at the night. Their strange position did not entirely smother the anxiety of the husbandman.

The moment he went out he saw the coffin up against the wall. It roused him to a wrath he could scarce restrain. But he shut his lips tight, and, in terror lest his wife should see or hear, took the hateful thing, awkward burden as it was, in his two arms, and, carrying it to the

SALTED WITH FIRE

back of the cornyard, shoved it over the low wall into the dry ditch at the foot of it, and heaped dirty straw from the stable over it, vowing that Webster should not soon hear the last of it, neither have a sixpence for his self-imposed and premature ministration. Besides, he had never lined the thing!

“Fain wud I screw the reid heid o’ ’im intill that same kist, and haud him there, short o’ smorin’!” he muttered. “Faith, I could ’maist beery him ootricht!” he added, with a grim smile, as he returned to the house.

Ere he entered it, however, he walked a little way up the hill to cast over the vault above him a farmer’s look of inquiry as to the coming night, and went in shaking his head at what the clouds foreboded.

When they had finished their supper, and Eppie had taken away the remnants, the two went into the dead-chamber, to hold their sad, perplexed lyke-wake. Eppie, having cleaned up, and rested the fire in the kitchen, came also into the parlour, and sat down just inside the door. James, who had lighted a candle, and taken his place at the table with a book, bethought himself, and, rising, joined his parents.

Peter had said nothing about the night, and indeed, in his wrath with the carpenter, had not noted how imminent was the storm. The air

SALTED WITH FIRE

had grown very sultry; the night had become, as it seemed, unnaturally dark, for there was a good-sized moon, which great, black, changing clouds had blotted out. It was plain that long ere the morning a terrible storm must break, but as yet it was not quite ripe, and, as with other and more dread evils, they could only be still and wait for it. Midnight was come and gone ere it arrived, with a forked and vibrating flash of keen, angry light. It vanished in a darkness whose presence for a moment the eyeballs felt almost like a solid weight. Then all at once it seemed torn and shattered into sound, into heaps of bursting, roaring, tumultuous billows. Another flash was followed by yet another and another, each with its attendant volley of crashing avalanches. At the first flash Peter had risen and gone to the larger window of the parlour, to discover, if he could, in what direction the storm was travelling. Marion, in the region of whose nerves a thunderstorm was always reproduced, feeling herself suddenly unroofed as it were, followed him thither, and left James alone with the dead. He sat, not daring to move; but when the third flash came it flickered and played so long about the dead face, and made it come so vividly out of the darkness, that his gaze was, as it were, fascinated by it. The same moment, while he was almost

SALTED WITH FIRE

unconsciously and the more fixedly regarding it, all at once, without a single previous movement, Isy sprang to her feet upon the bed.

A great cry from the chamber came to the ears of the father and mother in the parlour. They hurried in. James lay motionless and senseless on the floor; for the strength of a man's nerves is not necessarily in the same ratio with the hardness of his heart: the inrush of the overwhelming fact had given him an unsustainable shock.

Isobel lay gasping and sighing across the bed.

She knew nothing yet of what had happened to her, or that, in coming to life, she had terrified her faithless lover almost to death. She scarcely yet knew herself, and did not know that James lay unconscious on the floor by the side of her bed.

When the mother entered, she saw nothing, only heard Isy's breathing. But when her husband entered with a candle, and she saw her son, she forgot Isy, and all her anxiety was about James. She dropped on her knees beside him, and, raising his head, held it to her bosom, lamenting over him as if he were dead in her arms. She was even annoyed with the poor girl who lay struggling back into life; she felt toward her as if she was behaving indiscreetly: why should she, whose history was what it was,

SALTED WITH FIRE

be the cause of such a catastrophe to her worshipful son? Was she worth one of his little fingers? Let her moan away there — what did it matter? She would see to her presently, when her boy was better.

Very different was the effect upon Peter when he saw Isy coming to herself. It was a miracle indeed — nothing less! White as was her face, there was in it an unmistakable look of reviving life; when she opened her eyes and saw her master bending over her, she greeted him with a faint smile, closed her eyes again, and lay still. James began to show signs of recovery, and he turned to him. With the old sullen look of his boyhood, he glanced up at his mother, who was overwhelming him with caresses and tears.

“Let me up,” he said querulously, and began to wipe his face. “I feel strange. What can have made me turn so sick?”

“Isy’s come to life again!” said his mother.

“Oh!” he returned, and was silent.

“Ye’re surely no sorry for that!” rejoined his mother, rising with a weary air of disappointment.

“I’m pleased to hear it: why should I not be? I suppose she gave me a great start. Why, I can’t tell.” He took care not to say, “I don’t know.” “But then I never expected it, as you did!”

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Weel, ye *are* hertless!” said his father. “Hae ye nae spark o’ fellow-feelin’ wi’ yer mither whan the lass comes to life she has been murnin’ for deid, watchin’ ower like nane but herself? But I doot she’s aff again, deid or in a dwaum, and maybe she’ll slip frae oor airms yet!”

James only turned his head aside as he lay, and murmured something inaudible.

But Isy had only fainted. After some eager ministrations on the part of Peter, she came to herself once more, and lay panting, her forehead wet as with the dew of death.

The farmer ran out to a loft in the yard, and calling the herd-boy, a clever lad, told him to rise and ride for the doctor as fast as the mare could go.

“Tell him,” he said, “that Isy has come to life, but he maun munt and ride like the vera mischeef, or she’ll be deid again afore he wins till her. Gien ye canna get the tae doctor, awa’ wi’ ye to the tither, and dinna ley him till ye see him i’ the saiddle and startit. Syne ye can ease the mere and come hame at yer leisur! He’ll be here lang afore ye! — I’ll pey him ony fee he likes, and no compleen!”

The boy ran to the stable, and when he came back on the mare, the farmer was waiting for him with the whisky bottle in his hand.

“Na, na!” he said, seeing the lad eye the

SALTED WITH FIRE

bottle, "it's no for you; ye need a' the sma' wit ye ever hed; and ye haena to rin, — ye hae but to ride like the deevil! Hae, Susy!"

He poured half a tumblerful into a soup-plate, and held it out to the mare, who did not even snuff at it, but licked it up greedily, and started off herself at a good round pace.

Peter carried the bottle into the chamber, and between them his wife and he managed to make Isy swallow a little, after which she began to recover. In the course of an hour and a half, the doctor arrived, full of amazed incredulity. He found Isy asleep, and James gone to bed, unable, apparently, to recover from the shock he had received.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XXIII

THE next day, Isy, although very weak, was greatly better. She was, however, too ill to get up; and Marion seemed now in her element, with two invalids, both dear to her, to look after. She hardly knew for which to be the more grateful, — for her son, now given helpless into her hands, and unable to repel the love she lavished upon him; or for the girl whom God had taken from the very throat of the grave. Her heart seemed to bubble over with gladness, — soon to be moderated when she saw how ill James proved to be. Nor was it long before she feared lest perhaps she should have to part with her hitherto unloving child, in exchange for the devoted girl who never could be her own. If ever she thought of the two together, which she could not always help, she would turn away from the impossible idea with a sort of meek loathing. How would her James endure the suggestion of her holding, even for a moment, together in the same thought, himself and any girl that was less spotless than he!

SALTED WITH FIRE

But James was very ill, and growing worse ; for what one of our old Saxon poets calls the Backbite of Conscience had him fixed in its hold, and was worrying him at last. Whence it came we know, but how it came, and how it began its saving torment, who can understand but God the maker of men? The beginnings of conscience, and the beginnings of its work, are both infinitesimal, as are all God's beginnings, wrapt in the mystery of creation.

Their results only, not their mode of operation or the stages of it, I can attempt to convey. It was the wind blowing where it listed that did all and explained nothing. That wind from the timeless and spaceless and formless realities of God's feeling and thought blew open the eyes of this man's mind so that he saw, and became aware of what he saw. It blew away the gathered mists of his satisfaction and self-conceit ; it blew wide the windows of his soul, that the sweet odour of his father and mother's thoughts concerning him might enter, and when it entered, he knew it for what it was ; it blew back to him his own judgments of them and their doings, and he saw those judgments side by side with his new insights into their thoughts and feelings ; it blew away the desert sands of his own moral dulness, indifference, and dead selfishness, that had so long hidden beneath them the

SALTED WITH FIRE

watersprings of his own heart, created by and for love and its joy; it cleared all his conscious existence, made him understand that he had never loved his mother or his father, never loved any neighbour, never loved God one genuine atom, never loved the Lord Christ, his Master, or cared at all that he had died for him; never at any moment loved Isy, least of all when to himself he pleaded, in excuse of his behaviour toward her, that he loved her. In a word, that blowing wind which he could not see nor knew whence it came, still less whither it was going, — that wind began to blow together his soul and those of his parents; the love in his father and in his mother drew him; the memories of his boyhood and his childhood drew him; the heart of God drew him; and as he yielded to the drawing and went nearer, they grew more and more lovely to him; until at last, I know not how God did it, or what he did to the soul of James Blatherwick to make it different, but so he grew at length capable of loving, and loved, — first because he yielded to love and could not help it; then loved with a will because he *could* love, and, become conscious of the power, loved the more, and so went on to love more and more. Thus he became what he had to become or perish.

But before he could reach this, or grow capable

SALTED WITH FIRE

of knowing and striving after it, he had to pass through wild regions of torment and horror; he had to become all but mad, and know it; his body and his soul had to be parched with fever, thirst, and hopeless fear; he had to fall asleep, and dream lovely dreams of coolness and peace and courage; then wake and know that he had all his life been dead, and now he lived; to know that love, newborn, and now first awake in his heart, had driven out of it the gibbering phantoms; now, now, it was good to be, and know that others were alive about him; now, life was possible, because life was to love, and love was to live. The knowledge of this began in him then, and he knew it for the good and acceptable, the perfect and eternal will of God. What that love was, or how it was, he knew nothing, — only that it was the will and the joy of the Father and the Son. The spiritual vision grew in him, — grew until it was the surest thing of all; grew until, compared with aught else, it was the only sure thing.

And long ere it came to this, all the meanness of his behaviour to Isy had become plain to him, bringing with it an overpowering self-contempt and self-loathing, — such that he was even driven to the thought of self-destruction, to escape the knowledge that he was himself the man who had been such as to do such things. “To know my

SALTED WITH FIRE

deed, 't were best not know myself!" But by and by he grew reconciled to the fact that he must live, for how otherwise could he in any degree make atonement? And with the thought of reparation, and following forgiveness and reconciliation, his old love for Isy returned like a flood, and in far nobler kind than before, becoming at last a genuine, self-forgetting devotion. Until this change arrived, however, the paroxysms of his remorse rose now and then almost to madness, and for long it seemed doubtful whether his mental condition might not be permanently tinged with insanity; during which time he conceived a great disgust at his office and all its requirements; sometimes in his wanderings bitterly blaming the parents who had not interfered with his choice of a profession which had been his ruin, and which now he detested.

One day, having had no return of the delirium for a good many hours, he suddenly called out as they stood by his bed, —

"Oh, mother! Oh, father! *why* did you tempt me to such hypocrisy? *Why* did you not bring me up at the plough-tail? Then I should never have been exposed to the cursed snares of the pulpit! It was that which seduced me, — the notion that I must take the minister for my pattern, and live up to that idea before I had anything real in me. That was the road royal to

SALTED WITH FIRE

hypocrisy! Without that I might have been no worse than other people! Now I am lost! Now I shall never get to bare honesty, not to say innocence! That is gone for ever!”

The poor mother could only imagine that his humility made him accuse himself of hypocrisy because he had not fulfilled to the uttermost the duties of his great office.

“Jamie, dear,” she would cry, laying her cheek to his, “cast yer care upon Him that careth for you. He kens ye hae dune yer best, or if no yer vera best — for wha daur say that? — ye hae dune what ye could!”

“Na, na,” he answered, resuming the speech of his boyhood, — a far better sign of him than his mother understood, — “I ken ower muckle, and that muckle ower weel, to lay sic a flattering unction to my soul! It’s jist as black as the fell mirk! Ah, limed soul, that, struggling to be free, art more engaged!”

“Hoots, ye’re dreamin’, laddie! ye never was engaged to onybody, at least that ever I h’ard tell o’. But fash na ye aboot that! Gien it be onything o’ sic a natur that’s troublin’ ye, yer father and me we s’ hae ye clear o’ ’t some gait!”

“Ay, there ye’re at it again. It was *you* that laid the bird-lime! Ye aye tuik pairt, mither, wi’ the muckle deil that wad hae my sowl in ’s deepest pit!”

SALTED WITH FIRE

“The Lord kens his ain; he ’ll see that they come throuw unscaumit!”

“The Lord disna mak’ ony hypocreet o’ purpose, doobtless; but gien a man sin efter he has ance come to the knowledge of the trowth, there remaineth for him — ye ken the lave o’ ’t as weel as I do mysel’, mother! My only houp lies in a doobt whether I had ever come to a knowledge o’ the trowth — or hae yet! Maybe no.”

“Laddie, ye’re no i’ yer richt min’. It’s fearsome to hearken to ye!”

“It’ll be waur to hear me roarin’ like the rich man i’ the low o’ hell!”

“Peter! Peter!” called out Marion, driven almost to distraction; “here’s yer ain son, puir fallow, blaspheming like ane o’ the condemned! He jist gars me creep!”

Receiving no answer, for her husband was nowhere near her at the moment, she called in her despair, —

“Isy! Isy! come and see gien ye can dee onything to quaiet this ill bairn.”

It was the third day of his fever. Isy was by this time much better, — able to eat and go about the house. She sprang from her bed, where at the moment she lay resting.

“Coming, mistress!” she answered; “coming as fast as my legs ’ll carry me!”

She had not yet seen James, nor he her, since

SALTED WITH FIRE

her resurrection, as Peter always called her restoration.

“Isy! Isy!” cried James the moment he heard her steps, “come and haud the deil aff o’ me!”

He rose to his elbow and looked eagerly toward the door.

She entered. James threw wide his arms, and with glowing eyes took her and pressed her to his bosom. She made no resistance, for she knew his mother would think the fever only spoke, and thus best she might hold him uncompromised, nor rouse in her any suspicion. He broke into wild words of love, repentance, and devotion; but she was determined he should be held accountable for nothing he might say.

“Never heed him a hair, mem: he’s clean aff o’ his heid!” she said in a low voice, looking round to where she sat, and making no attempt to free herself from his embrace, but treating him like a delirious child. “There’s something about me that quiets him a bit! It’s the brain, ye ken, mem! it’s the het brain! We maunna contre him; he maun hae his ain w’y for a wee!”

But such was his behaviour to her, for he had no thought of concealment, that it was impossible for the mother not to suspect at least that this was far from the first time they had met;

SALTED WITH FIRE

and presently she began to think she must herself have seen Isy before ever she came to Stonecross. She dared not, however, probe the question before one in the heat of a growing fever; but when in the matter, and, by and by, her husband came in, and she found herself compelled, much against her will, to leave the two together, she sent up Eppie to take Isy's place, with the message that she was to go down at once to her dinner. Isy obeyed, but, perturbed and trembling, dropped on the first chair she came to in the kitchen. The farmer, already seated at the table, looked up, and, anxiously regarding her, said, —

“Bairn, ye 're no fit to be aboot! Ye maun caw canny, or ye 'll be ower the burn yet or ever ye 're safe upo' this side o' 't! Preserve's a'! are we to lowse ye twice in ae month?”

“Jist answer me ae question, Isy, and I 'll speir nae mair —”

“Na, na, never a question!” interposed Peter, “no ane afore even the shaidow o' deith be worn aff o' the hoose! — Draw ye up to the table, my bonny bairn: this isna a time for ceremony; there's sma' room for that ony day!”

Finding she sat motionless and death-like, he got up, and, pouring out a spoonful of whisky, insisted on her swallowing it. She did so, and, glad to put herself under his protection, took

SALTED WITH FIRE

the chair he had placed for her beside him, and made a futile attempt to eat.

"It's sma' won'er the puir thing has na muckle appeteeet," remarked Mrs. Blatherwick, "considerin' the w'y yon ravin' laddie up the stair has been carryin' on till her!"

"What! Hoo's that?" interposed her husband, with a start.

"But ye're no to mak' onything o' that, Isy," added her mistress in conclusion.

"No ae hair," returned Isy. "I ken weel it stan's for naething but the heat o' the burnin' brain. But I'm richt glaid the sicht o' me did seem to comfort him a wee, just for a meenut!"

"Weel, I'm no sae sure!" answered Marion. "But we'll say nae mair anent it for the noo! The guidman says no, and his word's law i' this hoose."

Isy resumed her pretence of dining. Presently Eppie came down, and, going up close to her master, for she was hard of hearing, said, —

"Here's my man, sir, come to speir efter the yoong minister and Isy. Am I to gar him come in?"

"Ay, and gie him his denner," answered the farmer.

The old woman set a chair for him by the door, and proceeded to attend to him.

Silence again fell, and the ceremony of dining

SALTED WITH FIRE

was resumed. Peter was the only one that made a reality of it. Marion was occupied with many thinkings, and a growing doubt and soreness with regard to Isy. She had been good to her for a long time, and what if, through it all, the girl had been cherishing plans of her own. She had consented not to press her with questions, and the hussy had taken advantage of her unsuspectingness. It would be a fine thing for her to get hold of the minister! but, please God, *that* she should not succeed in. It was too bad of her old friend, Mr. Robertson, whom she had known so long and trusted so well, to join with Isy to deceive her! She began to distrust ministers! No doubt they were right to venture much for the rescue of a brand from the burning; there were limits that ought not to be passed. Must the sinner be favoured at the expense of the honest woman? That could not be justified. It was not right. She would say so in the face of all the angels in heaven! It was doing evil that good might come. But good would not, never should come of it!

A cry of distress came from the room above. Isy started to her feet, but Marion was up almost before her.

“Sit doon this minute,” she commanded.

Isy hesitated.

“Sit doon this moment, I tell ye!” she re-

SALTED WITH FIRE

peated yet more imperiously. "Ye hae no business there. I'm gaein' till him mysel'!" and with the word she left the room.

Peter laid down his knife and fork, then sat up, stared bewildered, and rose apparently to follow his wife.

"Oh, my baby! my baby!" cried Isy; "if only I had you to take my part! God gave you to me, however ill I deserved you; but then how could I love you so? And then the mistress thinks I never had a baby. Maybe noo she'll say I killed my bonny wee man! But even for *his* sake I never ance wished ye hadna been born! And noo, whan he's ill, and cryin' oot for me, they winna lat me till 'im!"

The last words left her lips in a wailing shriek. Then she saw that her master had re-entered; and, wiping her eyes hurriedly, she turned to him with a pitiful apologetic smile, like the sunset of a dreary day.

"Dinna be sair vext wi' me, sir. I canna help bein' glaid that I had him, though to tyne him has gien me a sair, an unco sair hert!"

She stopped, terrified; for what had he heard? She could not tell what she might not have said. But the farmer had resumed his breakfast, and went on eating as if she had not spoken. But he had heard well enough, and was now inwardly digesting her words.

SALTED WITH FIRE

Isy sat still, saying to herself: "If only he loved me, I should be content, and want no more! I would never even want him to say it. I would be so good to him, and so silent, that he could not help loving me a little!"

I wonder whether she would have been as strong and as hopeful had the knowledge then been vouchsafed to her how his mother had loved him, and looked in vain for his love in return. And when Isy vowed in her heart never to let James know that she had borne him a son, certainly she never saw that thus she would be withholding from him the most potent of influences for his repentance and restoration to God and his parents. She did not see James again that night; but before she fell asleep at last in the small hours of the morning, she had made up her mind that, ere the same morning was clear upon the moor, she would, as the best, yes, only thing left her to do for James Blatherwick, be far away from Stonecross. She would go back to Deemouth, and beg for readmittance to the paper-mills she had left.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XXIV

SHE woke in the first of the grey dawn. In the house was utter stillness. She rose and dressed herself in soundless haste. Mr. Blatherwick, she knew, was that night watching by his son's bedside, who was no better. It was hard to go and leave him thus, but she had no choice. She held her breath and listened, but all was still. She opened her door very softly, and not a sound reached her ear as she crept down the stair, and left the house. She had not to unlock or unbolt the door, for it was never fastened. A dread feeling of the old time of wandering desolation came back upon her as she stepped across the threshold, but the worse sense of her now babyless lot soon banished its seriousness. None the less was she sad at leaving the place where she had found welcome, where peace and love had encompassed her for so long, where she had learned so much, and where she left him, it might be dying, whose life was so sadly and inextricably bound up with her own. She feared the moor, dreams of

SALTED WITH FIRE

which would yet often oppress brain and heart when she slept, hardly vanishing when she awoke; but now first crossing it in her new loneliness, the memory came back to her of the time when she lay in that long trance; partly conscious, but unable to move, she knew, or seemed to know, what was going on about her, and thought she was dead, and waiting to be buried. But she felt her Maker with her, and that he would not leave her. She felt no fear, and was not aware of the least struggle to come awake. All at once she found herself upon her feet, aware that she was still in the region of anxiety. Her first thought was not of rescue from the grave, but wonder where God was gone, for her heart was troubled. She had felt herself unaccountable for anything; now once more she had to think what to do.

Of the roads that led from the farm she knew only that by which Mr. Robertson had brought her there; it would lead her to the village where they had left the coach to walk to Stonecross, and there she would find some way of returning to Deemouth. She found the way very weary, for she was feeble after her prolonged inaction and the crowd of emotions that had succeeded her recovery. Long ere she reached the village, she seemed all but worn out. At the only house she had come to on the way, she stopped

SALTED WITH FIRE

and asked for water. The woman, the only human being she had seen, for it was still early morning, and the road always a lonely one, saw that she looked ill, and gave her milk instead. In the strength of that milk she reached the end of her first day's journey. For many days she had not to take a second.

Isy had once seen the soutar at the farm, and, going about her work, had listened to scraps of his conversation with the mistress; had been greatly struck by some things he said, and had often wished for a chance of talking to him. That morning, going along a narrow lane in the village, she heard the sound of a cobbler's hammer, and, glancing through a window close to the path, saw and at once recognised the soutar. He looked up, and could scarce believe his eyes when so early in the day he saw before him Mistress Blatherwick's maid, concerning whom there had been such a talk and such excitement for weeks. She looked ill, and he wondered she could be about so soon. She smiled to him, and passed from the window with a respectful nod. He sprang to his feet, and overtook her easily, for she was walking but slowly.

"I'm jist gaeing to drop wark, mem, and hae my brakfast; wull ye no come in and share? Ye hae come a gey bit, and ye luik sair fatiguit!"

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Thank ye kindly, sir,” returned Isy. “I am a bit tired. But I won’er ye kenned me.”

“Weel, I canna jist say I ken ye by the name fowk ca’ ye; and still less div I ken ye by the name the Lord ca’s ye; but that maitters little whan I ken that he has a name growin’ for ye; or, raither, a name ye ’re growin’ till! Eh, what a day will that be whan ilk habitant o’ the holy city ’ill tramp the streets o’ ’t weel kenned and weel kennin’!”

“Ay, sir! I un’erstan’ ye weel, for I h’ard ye conversin’ wi’ the mistress, that nicht ye broucht hame the maister’s shune. And I’m richt glaid to see ye ance mair!”

They were already in the house, for she had followed him in almost mechanically; and the soutar was setting for her the only chair there was, when the cry of a child reached their ears.

The girl started to her feet. A rosy flush of unexpected delight overspread her countenance; she began to tremble from head to foot, and seemed at once on the point of running to the cry, and of falling to the ground.

“Ay,” exclaimed the soutar, with one of his sudden flashes of unquestioning insight, “by the luik o’ ye, that ’ll be the cry o’ yer ain bairn, my bonny lass! Hae ye missed him for ony len’th o’ time past? Sit ye doon, and I’ll hae him i’ yer airms afore a meenut’s ower!”

SALTED WITH FIRE

She obeyed him and sat down, her eyes fixed wildly on the door. He feared lest she should fall again into her old trance, and made haste for the child. But when he returned with him in his arms, he found her sitting bolt upright, with her hands already apart, and held out to receive him. She still looked ready to fall, but her eyes were alive as he had never seen eyes before.

“My Jamie! my ain bairn!” she cried, seizing him to her bosom with hands that trembled and yet seemed to cling to him desperately, and a look almost of defiance, as if she dared the world to take him from her again.

“Oh, my God!” she cried, in an agony of thankfulness, “I ken ye noo! I ken ye noo! Never mair wull I doobt ye, my God and Father!—Lost and found! Lost for a wee, and found again for ever!”

Then she caught sight of Maggie, who had entered behind her father, and now stood motionless, staring at her, — with a look of gladness indeed, but not all of gladness.

“I ken,” Isy broke out, with a trembling, yet eager apologetic voice, “that ye’re grudgin’ me ilka luik at him! I ken ’t by mysel’! Ye’re thinkin’ him mair yours nor mine! And weel ye may, for it’s you that’s been motherin’ him ever since I lost my wits! It’s true I ran awa’

SALTED WITH FIRE

and left him, but ever sin' syne, I hae soucht him carefully wi' tears. And ye maunna beir me ony ill will — for there!" she added, holding out the child to Maggie, — "and I haena kissed him yet! — no ance! — Will ye lat me kiss him afore ye tak' him awa'? — my ain bairnie, whas vera comin' I had prepared shame for! Oh, my God! — But he kens naething about it, and winna ken for years to come! And nane but his ain mammie maun brak the dreid trowth till him! — and by that time he'll lo'e her weel enuch to be able to bide it! I thank God that I haena had to shue the birds and the beasts aff o' his bonny wee body. I micht hae had but for you, my bonny lass! — and for you, sir!" she added, turning to the soutar.

Maggie caught the child from her offering arms, and held his little face for her to kiss; and so held him until for the moment she was satisfied, and he began to whimper a little. Then Maggie sat down with him in her lap, and Isy stood absorbed in regarding him, every now and then lifting up her swimming eyes. Then she said, with a deep sigh, —

"And noo I maun awa', and I dinna ken hoo I'm to gang! I hae found him and maun leave him, I houp no for vera lang! Maybe ye winna min' keepin' him, say for a week mair? He's

SALTED WITH FIRE

been sae lang unused to a vagrant life that I doobt it winna weel agree wi' him, and I maun awa' back to Deemooth, gien I can get onybody to len' me a lift."

"Na, na; that'll never dee," returned Maggie, with a sob. "We'll be glaid eneuch to keep him,—though we hae nae richt against yer wull."

"Ye see I hae nae place to tak' him till!" said Isy, appealingly.

"Gien ye dinna want him, gie him to me: I want him!" said Maggie.

"Want him!" returned Isy, bursting into tears: "I hae lived but upo' the bare houp o' gettin' him again! I hae grutten my een sair for the sicht o' 'im! I hae wakent greetin' ohn kenned for what! and noo ye tell me I dinna want him, 'cause I hae nae spot but my breist to lay his heid upo'! Eh, guid fowk, keep him till I get a place to tak' him till, and syne haudna him a meenute frae me!"

All this time the soutar had been watching the two girls with a divine look in his black eyes and rugged face; and now he spoke—

"Them that haps the bairn, are aye sib to the mither," he said. "Gang ben the hoose wi' Maggie, and lie doon on her bed, and she'll lay the bairnie aside ye, and fess yer brakfast there till ye. Ye winna be easy to sair o' 'im,

SALTED WITH FIRE

haein' sae little for sae lang! Lea' them there thegither, Maggie, my doo," he went on with infinite tenderness, "and come and gie me a han' as sune as ye hae maskit the tay, and gotten a lof o' white breid. I s' hae my parritch a bit later."

Maggie obeyed at once, and took Isy to the other end of the house, where the soutar had long ago given up his bed to herself and the baby.

When all had their breakfast, she sat down in her old place beside her father, and for a long time they worked together without a word spoken.

"I doobt, father," said Maggie at length, "I haena been attendin' tae ye properly! I fear the bairnie's been garrin' me forget ye!"

"No a hair, dautie!" returned the soutar. "The needs o' the little ane stude aye far afore mine; he *had* to be seen till first. And noo that we hae the mither, we'll get on faumous! Isna she a fine cratur, and richt mitherlike wi' the bairn? That was a' I was anxious about. We'll get her story fae her or lang, and syne we'll ken a heap better hoo to help her. I' the meantime, I dinna fear but, atween you and me, and the Michty at the back o' 's, we s' get breid eneuch for the quaternion o' 's!"

He laughed at the odd word as it fell from

SALTED WITH FIRE

his mouth and the Acts of the Apostles; and Maggie laughed too, and wiped her eyes.

Before long Maggie knew that she had never been so happy in her life. Isy told them as much as she could without breaking her resolve, never mentioning the name of the minister except when it was natural and unavoidable. She wrote to Mr. Robertson, telling him where she was, and that she had found her baby. He came out with his wife to see her, and so began a friendship between the soutar and him which Mr. Robertson always declared one of the most fortunate things that had ever befallen him.

“That soutar body,” he would say, “kens mair about God and his kingdom, the heart o’ t and the w’ys o’ t, than ony man I ever h’ard tell o’ — and that heumble! — jist like the Son o’ God himsel’!”

Before many days passed, however, a great anxiety laid hold of the little household. Wee Jamie was taken so ill that the doctor had to be summoned. For some days the child was very ill, and his appealing looks were pitiful to see. When first he ceased to run about, and wanted to be nursed, no one could please him but the soutar himself, who, at once discarding his work at the petulant cry of the waking child, gave himself up to his service until he again slept. He grew so ill, however, as to want defter hand-

SALTED WITH FIRE

ling, and then no one would do but Maggie, to whom he was most accustomed. Isy could get no share in the labour of love except when he was asleep, and, as soon as he woke, had to bear the pain of hearing him cry for Maggie, and seeing him from his mother's lap stretch out his hands to one he knew better. But Maggie was very careful over the poor mother, and always, the minute he was securely asleep, would lay him softly upon her lap. One of the happiest moments in her life was the first time he consented — his recovery then a little advanced — to leave her arms for those of his mother. And soon he was so much better that Isy, as well as Maggie, was able to lend a helping hand and needle to the lining of some of the more delicate of the soutar's shoes.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XXV

THERE was, of course, great concern, and even alarm, at Stonecross because of the disappearance of Isy. But James continued so ill that his parents were unable to spend much thought upon any one else. At last, however, the fever left him, and he began to recover. But although he lay still and silent, seeming to take no interest in anything, and remembered nothing he had said, or even that he had seen Isy, his wakened conscience was still at work in him, and had more to do with his condition than any weakness from the prolonged fever. At length both his mother and father were convinced that he had something on his mind that interfered with his recovery, and his mother was positive that it had to do with "that deceitful creature, Isy." To know that she was safe gave Marion little satisfaction, so long as the place of her refuge was within a short distance of the close to the manse. Having once learned where the girl was, she had never asked another question about her. But her husband, having heard the words that fell from Isy when she thought her-

SALTED WITH FIRE

self alone, was intently though quietly waiting for what would follow.

“I’m doobtin’ sair, Peter,” began Marion one morning after a long talk with the cottar’s wife, who had been telling her of Isy’s domestication with the soutar, “I’m sair misdoobtin’ whether that hizzie hadna mair to do wi’ Jamie’s mischance nor we hae been jaloosin’! It seems to me he’s been lang broodin’ ower something we ken noucht about.”

“That would be nae ferlie, woman! Whan was it ever we kent onything gaein’ on i’ that mysterious laddie? Na, but his had need be a guid conscience, for did ever onybody ken eneuch aboot it or him to say richt or wrang till him? But gien ye hae ae thought he’s ever wranged that lassie, I s’ hae the trowth o’ ’t, gien it cost him a greitin’! He’ll never come to health o’ body or min’ till he’s confest, and God has forgi’en him. He maun confess!”

“Hoot, Peter, dinna be sae suspicious o’ yer ain. It’s no like ye to be sae maisterfu’ and owerbeirin’. I would na lat an ill thought o’ pur Jeemie inside this auld heid o’ mine! It’s the lassie, I’ll tak’ my aith, it’s that Isy’s at the bothom o’ ’t!”

“Ye’re some ready wi’ yer aith, Mirran, to what ye ken naething aboot! I say again, gien he’s dune ony wrang to that bonny cratur,—

SALTED WITH FIRE

and it wouldna tak' ower muckle proof to convince me o' the same, — he shall tak' his stan', minister or no minister, upo' the stule o' repentance!”

“Daur ye to speyk that gait aboot yer ain son — ay, and mine the mair gien *ye* disown him, Peter Blatherwick — and the Lord's ain ordeent minister forbye!” cried Marion, driven almost to her wits' end, but more by the persistent haunting of her own suspicions, which she could not repress, than by the terror of her husband's threat. “Besides, dinna ye see,” she added cunningly, “that that would be to affront the lass as weel? He's no' the first to fa' to the wiles o' a designin' wuman; and would it be for his ain father to expose him to public contempt? *Your* pairt suld be to cover up his sin, gien it were a multitude and no ae solitary bit faut!”

“Daur *ye* speyk o' a thing like that as a bit faut? Is leein' an' hypocrisy a bit faut? I alloo the sin itsel' mayna be jist damnable, but to what bouk mayna it come wi' ither and waur sins upo' the back o' 't. Wi' leein', and haudin' aff o' himsel', a man may grow a cratur no fit to be taen up wi' the taings! Eh me, but my pride i' the laddie! It 'ill be sma' pride for me gien this fearsome thing be true!”

“And wha daur say it's true?” rejoined Marion, almost fiercely.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Nane but himsel’; and gien he dinna confess, the rod laid upon him ’ill be the rod o’ iron, that braks a man like a muckle crock. I maun tak’ Jamie throuw han’!”

“Noo jist tak’ ye care, Peter, that ye dinna quench the smokin’ flax.”

“I’m mair likely to get the bruised reed intill my nakit loof!” returned Peter. “But I s’ say naething till he’s a wee better, for we maunna drive him to despair! Eh, gien he would only repent! What is there I wouldna du to clear him frae ony wrang to her! I wad dee wi’ thanksgivin’!”

“Weel I kenna that we’re jist called upon sae far as that!” said Marion. “A lass is aye able to luik efter hersel’!”

“I wud! I wud! — God hae mercy upo’ the twa o’ them!”

After that they were silent.

In the afternoon James was a good deal better; and when his father went in to see him, his first words were, —

“I doobt, father, I’m no likely to preach ony mair; I’ve come to see ’at I never was fit for the wark, neither had ony call till ’t.”

“It may be sae, Jeemie,” answered his father; “but we’ll haud awa’ frae conclusions till ye’re better, and able to jeedge correctly, wi’oot bias o’ ony thraving distemper.”

SALTED WITH FIRE

“O father,” James went on, and to his delight Peter saw, for the first time since he was the merest child, tears running down his cheeks, now thin and wan, — “O father, I hae been a terrible hypocreet! But my een hae come open at last. I see mysel’ as I am.”

“Weel, there ’s God hard by, to tak’ ye by the han’ like Enoch! Tell me,” Peter went on, “hae ye onything upo’ yer min’, laddie, ’at ye would like to confess and be eased o’? There ’s nae papistry in confessing to yer ain auld father!”

James lay still for a few moments; then he said, almost inaudibly, —

“I think I could tell my mother better nor you, father.”

“Weel, it ’ll be a’ ane whilk o’ ’s ye tell. The forgiein’ and the forgettin’ ’ll be ae deed — by the twa o’ ’s at ance! I s’ gang and cry doon the stair to yer mither to come up and hear ye.” For Peter knew by experience that good motions must be taken advantage of in their first ripeness. “We maunna try the speerit wi’ ony delays!” he added, and going to the head of the stair called aloud to his wife. Then returning to the bedside, he resumed his seat, and said, “I ’ll jist bide a minute till she comes.”

He was loath to let in any risk between his going and her coming, for he knew how quickly

SALTED WITH FIRE

minds may change; but the moment she appeared, he left the room, gently closing the door behind him.

Then the trembling, convicted soul plucked up what courage his stubborn heart was capable of, and began.

“Mother, there was a lass I cam’ to ken in Edinburgh, when I was a divinity student there, and —”

“Ay, ay, I ken a’ about it!” interrupted the mother, eager to spare him; “—an ill-faured, designing limmer, ’at micht ha’ kent better nor come ower a dacent woman’s son that gait! Sic like as she wad deceive the very elec’!”

“Na, na, mother, she was nane o’ that sort! She was bonny and guid and pleasant to the hert as to the sicht, and would have saved me gien I had been true till her! She was ane o’ the Lord’s makin’ as he has made but feow!”

“What for didna she haud frae ye till ye had merried her than?”

“Mother, in that word ye hae slandert yersel’! I’ll no say a ward mair.”

“I’m sure neither yer father nor mysel’ would hae stude i’ yer gait,” said Marion, retreating from the false position she had taken.

She did not know how bitter would have been her opposition; she had set her mind on a distinguished match for her Jamie.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“God knows how I wish I had had patience! Syne I micht hae steppit oot o’ the dirt o’ my hypocrisy, i’stead o’ gaein’ ower the heid intill ’t. I was aye a hypocrite, but she would maybe hae fun’ me oot, and shawed me to mysel’.”

He did not know the probability that, if he had not fallen, he would have but sunk the deeper in the worst bog of all, self-satisfaction, and would none the less have played her false, and left her to break her heart.

If any reader of this tale should argue it better then to do wrong and repent, than to resist the devil, I warn him that in such case he will not repent until the sorrows of death and the pains of hell itself lay hold upon him. An overtaking fault may be beaten with few stripes, but a wilful wrong shall be beaten with many stripes. The doer of the latter must share, not with Judas, for he did repent, but with those who have taken from themselves the power of repentance.

“Was there no mark left o’ her disgrace?” asked his mother. “Wasna there a bairn to mak’ it manifest?”

“Nane I ever heard tell o’.”

“In that case she’s no muckle the waur, and ye needna gang lamentin’; she’ll no be the ane to tell, and *ye* maunna, for her sake. Sae tak’ ye comfort ower what’s gane and dune wi’,

SALTED WITH FIRE

and canna come back, and maunna happen again. Eh, but it's a God's mercy there was nae bairn."

Thus had his mother herself become an evil counsellor, and cried Peace! peace! when there was no peace, tempting her own son to be a devil. The one thing that now stood up for the truth in his miserable heart was his reviving and growing love for Isy. It had seemed smothered in selfishness, but was alive and operative, God knows how, — perhaps through feverish, incoherent dreams.

He had expected his mother to aid his repentance, and uphold his walk in the way of righteousness, even should it be that of social disgrace. He knew well that reparation and repentance must go hand in hand where the All-wise was judge, and foolish Society was not allowed one despicable word to bring honour out of the most carefully hidden shame. He had been the covering slave of a false reputation, but his illness had roused him, set repentance before him, brought confession within sight, and purity within prayer.

"I maun gang till her as soon as ever I'm up," he cried. "Whaur is she, mother?"

"Upo' nae accoont see her, Jamie. It would be but to fa' again intill her snare," answered his mother, with decision in her look and tone.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“We’re to abstain frae a’ appearance o’ evil — as ye ken better nor I can tell ye.”

“But Isy’s no an appearance o’ evil, mother!”

“Ye say weel there, I confess. Na, she’s no an appearance; she’s the vera thing. Haud frae her, as ye would frae the ill ane himsel’.”

“Did she never lat on what there had been atween ’s?”

“Na, never. She kenned weel what would come o’ that.”

“What, mother?”

“The ootside o’ the door.”

“Think ye she ever tauld onybody?”

“Mony ane, I doobtna.”

“Weel, I dinna believe ’t. She’s heeld her tongue, and that weel.”

“Hoo ken ye that? What for said she never ae word aboot ye till yer ain mither?”

“’Cause she was set on haudin’ her tongue. Was she to bring an ower true tale o’ me to the vera hoose I was born in? As lang as I haud my tongue, she’ll never wag hers.”

“Weel, I alloo that’s deein’ as a wuman should — whan the faut’s a’ her ain.”

“And the faut bein’ a’ mine, mother, she wouldna tell what would disgrace me.”

“She micht hae kenned the secret would be safe wi’ me.”

SALTED WITH FIRE

"I nicht hae said the same but for the w'y I h'ard ye speyk o' her this vera minute. Whaur is Isy, mother?"

"Deed, she's made a munelicht flittin' o' 't."

"I telled ye she would never tell upo' me. I fear me noo ye hae driven her to tell a'. Did ye pay her her wages afore she gaed?"

"She gae me no time. But she winna tell noo, for wha would tak' her in?"

"Eh, mother, but ye *are* hard-hertit!"

"I ken a harder, Jamie."

"That's me, and ye're richt, mother. But, eh, gien ye wad hae me lo'e ye frae this minute to the end o' my days, be fair to Isy; *I* hae been a damned scoon'rel till her."

"Jamie, Jamie, ye're provokin' the Lord to anger, — sweirin' like that in his vera face, and you a minister!"

"I provokit him a heap waur whan I left Isy to dree her shame. St. Peter cursed awfu' gran' when he said to Simon the magician, 'Gang to hell wi' yer siller!'"

"She's tellt the soutar, onygait, or he wadna hae ta'en her in. It'll be a' ower the toon lang or this."

"And hoo will ye meet the trowth, mother?"

"We maun tell yer father, and get him to contrive wi' the soutar to haud the thing quaiet."

SALTED WITH FIRE

We maun jist stop her mou' wi' a bunch o' banknotes."

"Ye would mak' it 'maist impossible for her to forgi'e me ony langer?"

"And wha 's she to speak o' forgivin'?"

But here the door opened, and Peter entered. He went up to his wife, and stood over her like an angel of vengeance. His very lips were white.

"Efter thirty years o' merried life, noo first to ken the wife o' my bosom for a messenger o' Sawtan!" he panted. "Gang oot o' my sicht, wuman!"

She fell on her knees before him, and held up her two hands.

"Think o' Jamie, Peter!" she pleaded. "It's a' for him, only for him! I wad tyne my sowl for Jamie!"

"Ay, and his as weel! Tyne what's yer ain to tyne, wuman — and that's no your sowl, nor yet Jamie's! He's no yours or mine to save or to destroy! Wad ye sen' him straucht awa' to hell for the sake o' a guid name — a lee! a hypocrisy! Oot upo' ye for a Christian mither! — Jamie, I'm awa' to the toon, upo' my twa feet, for the mere's cripple: the vera deil 's i' the hoose and the stable and a', it would seem! I'm awa' to fess Isy hame! And, Jamie, ye'll jist tell her afore me and yer mither, that as

SALTED WITH FIRE

soon 's ye 're able to crawl to the kirk wi' her, ye 'll marry her afore the warl, and tak' her hame to the manse wi' ye!"

"Hoot, Peter! Wad ye disgrace him afore a' the beggars in Tiltbowie?"

"Ay, and afore God, that kens a'thing or onybody tell him! My han's and hert sall be clear o' this abomination!"

"Merry a wuman 'at was to be ta'en wi' a wat finger? — a maiden that never said *na*? — a lass that 's nae maiden, nor ever will be?"

"And wha's to blame for that?"

"Hersel'."

"Jamie! gang awa' wi' ye!"

"Oh, father, father," cried James, "forgi'e my mither afore ye gang, or my hert 'ill brak. It 's the awfu'est thing o' ony to see you twa striven wi' ane anither!"

"She 's no sorry, no ae bit sorry!" said Peter.

"I am, I am, Peter!" cried Marion, breaking down utterly. "Do what ye wull, and I 'll do the same — only let the thing be dune quaietly, 'ithoot din or proclamation. What for sud a'body ken a'thing! Wha has a richt to see intill ither fowk's herts and lives? The warl could ill gang on gien that was the gait o' 't."

"Father," said James, "I thank God that noo ye ken a'! Eh, sic a weight as it tak's aff o' me! I 'll be hale and weel noo in ae day. I think I 'll

SALTED WITH FIRE

gang wi' ye to Isy mysel'. But I'm a wee sorry ye cam' in jist that minute. I wuss ye had harkit a wee langer. For I wasna gi'en in to my mither; I was but luikin' to see hoo to say oot what was in me, and no vex her waur than couldna be helpit. Believe me, father, gien ye can; though I doobt ye winna be able!"

"I believe ye, my bairn; and I thank God I hae that muckle pooer o' belief left in me! I confess I was in ower great a hurry, and am sure ye war takin' the richt gait wi' yer puir mither. Ye see she lo'ed ye sae weel that she could think o' nae thing or body but yersel'. That's the w'y o' mithers, Jamie, gien ye only kenned it! She was nigh sinnin' an awfu' sin for your sake, man! That's what comes o' lovin' the praise o' men, Mirran. Easy it passes intill the fear o' men, and disregaird o' the Holy. — I s' awa' doon to the soutar, and tell him the cheenge that's come ower us a': he'll no be a hair surprised!"

"I'm ready, father — or will be in ae minute!"

"Na, na; ye're no fit! I would hae to be takin' ye upo' my back afore we war at the fut o' the brae. Bide ye at hame, and keep yer mither company."

"Ay, bide, Jamie, and I winna come near ye," sobbed his mother.

"Anything to please ye, mother, — but I'm fitter nor my father thinks."

SALTED WITH FIRE

So Peter went, leaving mother and son silent together.

At last the mother spoke.

“It’s the shame o’ ’t, Jamie!” she said.

“The shame was i’ the thing itsel’, mother, and in hidin’ frae the shame,” he answered. “Noo, I hae but the dregs to drink, and that I maun bide wi’ patience, for I hae weel deserved it. But, eh, my bonnie Isy, she maun hae suffert sair!”

“Her mither couldna hae brought her up richt! The first o’ the faut lay in the upbringing!”

“There’s anither wha’s upbringing’ wasna to blame, but was a’ it oucht to be!”

“It wasna! I see it plain the noo! I was aye ower feart o’ garrin’ ye hate me. Oh, Isy, Isy! I hae dune ye wrang! I ken ye never laid yersel’ oot to snare him!”

“Thank ye, mother. It was, really and truly, a’ my wyte! And noo my life sall gang to mak’ up till her!”

“And I maun see to the manse!” said his mother. “And first in order o’ a’, that Jinse o’ yours’ll hae to gang.”

“As ye like, mother. But for the manse, I maun clear oot o’ that! I speak nae mair frae that poopit! I hae hypocreesit in ’t ower lang! The thought o’ ’t scunners me!”

“Speykna like that o’ the poopit, Jamie,

SALTED WITH FIRE

whaur sae mony holy men hae stude up and spoken frae 't the word o' God! It frichts me to hear ye! Ye'll be a burnin' and shinin' licht i' that poopit for mony a lang day efter we're deid and hame!"

"The mair holy men that hae there witnessed, the less may ony livin' lee stan' there braggin' and blazin' i' the face o' God and man! It's shame o' mysel' that gars me hate the place, mother! Ance and no more wull I stan' there, makin' o' 't my stool o' repentance; and syne doon the steps and awa', like Adam frae the gairden!"

"And what's to come o' Eve? Are ye gaein', like him, to say, 'The wuman thou gavest me — it's a' her wyte?'"

"I'll tak' a' the wyte."

"But hoo can ye gien up there ye stan' and confess? Fowk'll aye gie her a full share at the least! Ye maun hae some care o' the lass — yer wife — efter a'. And what are ye to turn till, seein' ye hae put yer haun to the pleuch and turned back?"

"To the pleuch again, mother. Frae the kirk door I'll come hame like the prodigal to my father's hoose, and say till him, 'Set me to the pleuch, father. See gien I canna be something like a son to ye, after a'!'"

So wrought in him that mighty power, mys-

SALTED WITH FIRE

terious in its origin, as marvellous in its result, which had been at work in him all the time he lay whelmed under feverish phantasms. The result was no phantasm. His repentance was true; it was life from the dead. God and the man had met. As to *how* God turned the man's heart we can only say, "Thou, God, knowest." To understand it we should have to go down below the foundations themselves, underneath creation, and there watch God send out from himself, man, the spirit, distinguished yet never divided from him, for ever dependent upon and growing in him, never complete because his origin, his very life, is infinite; never outside of God because *in* him only he lives and moves and grows, and *has* his being. Brothers, let us not linger even to ask him questions, but turn at once to him this being that says *I* and *me*, and make haste to obey him, — so to become all we are capable of being, so to learn all we are capable of knowing. Only the pure in heart shall see God; and they who see him know more than the wise and prudent can ever see until they also become pure in heart.

Something like this was the meditation of the soutar, as he saw the farmer stride away into the dusk of the gathering twilight, going home with glad heart to his wife and son.

He had told the soutar that the sickness of

SALTED WITH FIRE

his son had brought to light that a sin of his youth and its concealment had for a long time troubled him, and now he was resolved to make all the reparation he could.

“Mr. Robertson,” he told him, “brought the lass to oor hoose, never mentionin’ Jamie, for he didna ken they war onything to ane anither; and for her, she never said ae word about him to Mirran or me.”

The soutar went to the door and called Isy. She came, and stood humbly before her old master, waiting for him to speak.

“Weel, Isy,” said he, kindly, “ye gied’s a clever slip the ither morning and a gey fricht forbye! What possessed ye, lass, to dae sic a thing?”

She stood distressed, and made no answer.

“Hoot, lassie, tell me,” insisted Peter, “I haena been an ill maister to ye, have I?”

“Sir, ye hae been mair nor guid till me. But I canna — that is, I maunna — or raither, I’m determined no’ to explain the thing.”

“Thought ye my wife was feared the minister nicht fa’ in love wi’ ye?”

“Weel, sir, there nicht hae been something like that intill ’t! But I wantit sair to win at my bairn again; for i’ that trance I lay intill sae lang, I saw or h’ard something I took for an intimation that he was alive, and no that far awa’.

SALTED WITH FIRE

And wad ye believe 't, sir, i' this vera hoose I fand him, and here I hae him, and I'm jist as happy the noo as I was miserable afore! Is 't ill o' me 'at I canna be sorry ony mair?"

"And noo," said Mr. Blatherwick, "ye'll be able to tell 's wha 's the father o' 'im!"

"Na, I canna dee that, sir; it's eneuch that I hae disgracet *mysel'*! Ye wadna hae me disgrace anither as weel! What guid would that be?"

"It would help ye beir the disgrace better."

"No a hair better, sir; *he* couldna stan' the disgrace half sae weel 's me my lane. I reckon the man the weaker vessel, sir; the woman has her bairn to fend for, and that tak's her thoughts off o' the shame!"

"You dinna tell me he gies ye noucht to maintain the crature upo'?"

"I tell ye naething, sir. He never even kenned there *was* a bairn!"

"Hoot, toot! ye canna be sae semple as that comes till! Did ye never tell him?"

"'Deed, no; I was ower sair ashamit! Ye see it was a' my wyte, and it was naeboddy's business! My auntie said gien I wouldna tell I micht put the door atween 's; and I took her at her word, for I kenned she couldna keep a secret, and I wasna gaein' to hae *his* name mixed up wi' a lass like *mysel'*! And, sir, ye maunna

SALTED WITH FIRE

try to gar me tell, for I hae no richt, and surely ye haena the hert!"

"I dinna blame ye, Isy! but there's jist ae thing I'm determined upo', and that is that the rascal sall merry ye!"

Isy's face flushed; she was taken too much at unawares to hide her pleasure at such a word from *his* mouth. But presently the flush faded, and Mr. Blatherwick saw that she was fighting with herself. Then the mere shadow of a pawky smile flitted across her face as she answered, —

"Surely ye wouldna merry me upon a rascal, sir! Ill as I hae behaved till ye, I hae hardly deservit that at yer han'!"

"That's what he'll hae to do, though, — jist merry ye affhan'! I's *gar* him."

"I winna hae him garred! It's me that has the richt ower him, and no anither, man or wuman, and he sanna be garred! What would ye hae me, thinkin' I would tak' a man 'at was garred! Na, na; there's be nae garrin'! And ye canna gar *him* merry me gien I winna hae him! The days are by for that!"

"Weel, my bonny leddy," said Peter, "gien I had a prince to my son, providit he was worth yer takin', I would sae to ye, 'Hae!'"

"And I would say to you, sir, 'No, — gien he bena willin'," answered Isy, and ran from the room.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Weel, what think ye o’ the lass, Mr. Blatherwick?” said the soutar, with a twinkle in his eye.

“I think jist what I thought afore,” answered Peter; “she’s ane amo’ a million!”

“I’m no that sure about the proportion!” returned MacLear. “I doobt ye nicht come upo’ twa afore ye wan throw the million! A million’s a heap o’ women!”

“All I care to say is, that gien Jeemie binna ready to leav’ father and mother and kirk and steeple, and cleave to that wuman and her only, he’s no a mere ‘gomeril, but jist a meeserable, wickit fule! and I s’ never speyk word till him again, wi’ my wull, gien I live to the age o’ auld Methuselah!”

“Tak’ tent what ye say, or mint at sayin’ to persuad’ him: Isy ’ill be upon ye!” said the soutar, laughing. “But hearken to me, Mr. Blatherwick, and sayna a word to the minister about the bairnie.”

“Na, na; it’ll be best to lat him fin’ ’t oot for himsel’. And noo I maun be gaein’, for I hae my wallet fu’.”

He strode to the door, holding his head high, and, with never a word more, went out. The soutar closed the door and returned to his work, saying aloud as he went, “Lord, lat me ever and aye see thy face, and desire noucht mair, excep’

SALTED WITH FIRE

that the haill warl, O Lord, may behold it likewise."

Peter Blatherwick went home joyous at heart. His son was his son, and no villain! — only a poor creature, as is every man until he turns to the Lord, away from ambition and care for the judgment of men. He rejoiced also that the girl he had befriended would be a strength to his son; that she whom his wife would have rejected had proved herself noble. And he praised the Father of men, that the very wanderings of those he loved had brought about their repentance and uplifting.

"Here I am!" said the farmer, as he entered. "I hae seen the lassie ance mair, and she's better and bonnier than ever!"

"Ow, ay; ye're jist like a' the men I ever kenned!" said Marion, smiling; "easy ta'en wi' the skin-side!"

"Doobtless; the Makker has ta'en a heap o' pains wi' the skin! Ony gait yon lassie's ane amang ten thoosan! Jeemie here suld be on his knees till her this vera moment, — no sitting there glowerin' as gien his een were two balls, — fired aff but never won oot o' the barrels!"

"Hoot! wad ye hae him gang on his knees to ony but the Ane?"

"Aye wad I — to ony ane that's nearer His lik'ness nor Jeemie himsel' — and that ane's oor

SALTED WITH FIRE

Isy! — I wouldna won'er, Jamie, gien ye war fit for a drive the morn! In that case, I'll caw ye doon to the toon to say yer say to Isy."

James did not sleep much that night, and nevertheless was greatly better the next day, — indeed almost well; and before noon they were at the soutar's door. He opened it himself, and took the minister straight to the ben-end of the house, where Isy sat alone. She rose, and with downcast eyes went to meet him.

"Isy," he faltered, "can ye forgi'e me? and will ye merry me as soon as ever we can be cried? I'm as ashamed o' mysel' as even ye would hae me!"

"Ye haena sae muckle to be ashamet o' as mysel', sir: it was a' my ain wyte!"

"And syne no to haud my face till't! I'm that ashamet o' mysel' I canna luik ye i' the face!"

"Ye didna ken whaur I was. I ran awa' that naebody nicht ken."

"What necessity was there for onybody to ken? I'm sure ye never tellt!"

Isy went to the door and called Maggie. James stared bewildered.

"This tellt," she said, re-entering with the child, and laying him in James's arms.

He gasped with astonishment, almost consternation.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Is this mine?” he stammered.

“Yours and mine, sir,” she replied. “Wasna God a heap better till me than I deserved? Sic a bonny bairn! no a mark, no a spot upon him frae heid to fut to tell hoo he cam’, or that he ouchtna to be here! — Gie the bonny wee man a kiss, Mr. Blatherwick. Haud him close to ye, sir, and he’ll tak’ the pain oot o’ yer hert: aften has he ta’en ’t oot o’ mine! He’s yer ain son, sir, and cam’ to me wi’ the Lord’s forgiveness lang or I was able to beg for ’t. Eh, but we maun mak’ up till him for the wrang we did him afore he was born — gien that be possible! But he’ll be like his great Father, and forgi’e us baith!”

When Maggie had given the child to his mother, she returned to her father, and sat beside him, crying softly. He turned on his leather-bottomed stool, and looked at her.

“Canna ye rejoice wi’ them that rejoice, whan ye hae nane to greit wi’, Maggie, my doo?” he said. “Ye haena lost ane, and ye hae gained twa! Haudna the glaidness back, that’s sae fain to come to the licht, even in your grudgin’ hert, Maggie! God himsel’ ’s glaid, and the Shepperd ’s glaid, and the angels are a’ makin’ sic a flut-flutter wi’ their muckle wings, I can ’maist see naething for them!”

Maggie rose, and stood a moment wiping her

SALTED WITH FIRE

eyes. The same moment the door opened, and James entered with the little one in his arms. He laid him with a smile in Maggie's.

"Thank you, sir!" said the girl humbly, and clasped the child to her bosom; nor, after that, was ever a cloud of jealousy to be seen on her face. I will not say she never longed or wept after the child, whom she still regarded as her very own even when he was gone away with his father and mother; she mourned for him like a mother from whom death has taken her first-born; neither did she see much difference to her between the two forms of loss, for she knew that neither life nor death could destroy the relation that already and for ever existed between them. She could not be her father's daughter and not understand that; so, like a bereaved mother, she only gave herself the more to her father.

I will not dwell on the delight of James and Isobel, thus restored to each other, the one from a sea of sadness, the other from a gulf of perdition. Our sins and our iniquities shall be no more remembered against us for ever, when we take refuge with the Father of Jesus and of us. Nothing we have done can ever separate us from him,—nothing can, except our abiding in the darkness and refusing to come to the light.

SALTED WITH FIRE

Before James left the house, the soutar took him aside, and said, —

“Daur I offer ye a word o’ advice, sir?”

“Deed, that ye may,” answered the young man, with humility; “and I dinna see hoo I can miss doin’ as ye tell me; for you and my father and Isy atween ye hae jist saved my vera life!”

“Weel, what I would beg o’ ye is, that ye tak’ no step concernin’ Isy afore ye see Maister Robertson and tell him the haill affair.”

“I’m vera willin’,” answered James, “gien Isy hersel’ be content.”

“Ye may be vera certain, sir, she’ll be naething but pleased: she has a gran’ opinion, and weel she may, o’ Maister Robertson. Ye see, sir, I want ye to put yersel’s i’ the han’s o’ a man that kens ye baith, and the hauf o’ yer story a’ready; ane wha’ll judge ye truly and mercifully, and no condemn ye affhan’. He’ll be the man to tell ye what ye oucht to dee neist.”

“I will — and thank you, Mr. MacLear. But ae thing I houp, — that you nor he will ever try to persuad’ me to gang on preachin’. Ae thing I’m set upon, and that is to deliver my sowl frae hypocrisy, and gang saftly the lave o’ my days! Happy man wad I no be, had I been set at the first to ploo and reap and gether intill the barn, instead o’ creepin’ intill a boat to fish for men

SALTED WITH FIRE

wi' naething but a foul and tangled net! I'm affrontit and disgustit at mysel'! Eh, the presumption o' the thing! But I have been weel and richteously punished! The Father drew his han' oot o' mine, and loot me try to gang my lane, and doon I cam', for I was fit only to fa'; naething less would hae brought me to mysel' — and that took a lang time! I hae a great houp that Mr. Robertson will see the thing as I dae mysel'! — Wull I write and ask him oot to Stanecross to advise wi' my father about Isy? That would bring him! There never was man readier to help! — But it's surely my part to gang to him and mak' my confession, and tak' his judgment! Only I maun gang and tell Isy first!”

He found her not only willing, but eager that Mr. Robertson should know everything.

“But be sure,” she said, “you let him know too that you come of yourself, and that I never asked you.”

But Peter said he must himself go with him, for he was but weakly yet, — and the very next day, before anything should transpire.

The news which father and son carried to the Robertsons filled them with pleasure; and if their reception of James made him feel the repentant prodigal he was, it was by its heartiness, and their jubilation over Isy. The next Sun-

SALTED WITH FIRE

day Mr. Robertson preached in James's pulpit, and published the banns of marriage between James Blatherwick and Isobel Rose, returning the two following Sundays for the same purpose, and on the next Monday marrying them at Stonecross, — when also the little one was baptised, by the name of Peter, in his father's arms, — amid much gladness, not quite unmingled with shame. The soutar and his Maggie were the only friends present besides the Robertsons. Before the breaking up, Peter put the big Bible in the hands of the soutar, who, at the desire of the company, led their prayers, when this was very nearly what he said: "O God, to whom we belang, hert and soul, body and blude and banes, hoo great art thou, and hoo close to us, to haud sic a grand and fair, sic a just and true, ownership ower us! We bless thee hertily; and rejoicin' for what we are, still mair for what thou art thysel! Tak' to thy hert, and haud them there, these thy twa repentant sinners, and thy ain little ane and theirs, wha's innocent as thoo hast made him. Gie them sic grace to bring him up that he be nane the waur for the wrang they did him afore he was born; and lat the knowledge o' his parents' faut haud him safe frae onything sic like! and may they baith be the better for their fa', and live a heap the mair to the glory

SALTED WITH FIRE

o' their Father by cause o' that slip! And gien ever the minister should again preach thy word, may it be wi' the better comprehension and the mair fervour; and to that end gie him to understan' the height and depth and breadth and len'th o' thy forgivin' love. Thy name be gloryfeed. Amen!"

"Na, na! I'll never preach again!" whispered James to the soutar, as they rose from their knees.

"I winna be a'thegither sure o' that!" returned the soutar. "Doobtless ye'll dee as the Spirit shaws ye!"

James made no answer, and neither spoke again that night.

The next morning James sent to the clerk of the synod his resignation of his parish and office, setting plainly forth under what necessity he did so.

No sooner had Marion, repentant under her husband's terrible rebuke, set herself to resist her rampant pride than the indwelling goodness arose in her with an overwhelming rush, and she was herself again, — her old and lovely self. Little Peter, with his beauty and his winsome ways, melted and scattered the last lingering rack of the evil fog of her ambition for her son. Twenty times a morning would she drop her work to catch up and caress her grandchild, and

SALTED WITH FIRE

overwhelm him with endearments. And over the return of his mother — her second Isy, now her daughter indeed — she was jubilant.

From the first publication of the banns, she had been busy cleaning and setting to rights the parlour, which she intended making over entirely to Isy and James; but the moment Isy discovered her intent, she protested obstinately; it should not, could not, must not be! The very morning after the wedding she was down in the kitchen, and had put the water on the fire for the porridge before her husband was awake. The water was already boiling and the table laid for breakfast before her mother was down, or her father come in from his last preparations for the harvest.

“I ken weel,” said Isy to Marion, “that I hae nae richt to contre ye; but ye ken ye war glaid eneuch o’ my help whan first I cam’ to be yer servan’-lass: what for shouldna things be jist the same noo? I ken a’ the w’ys o’ the place, — divna I, noo? — and they’ll lea’ me plenty o’ time to tak’ the bairnie oot, and play wi’ him as muckle as ever he wad hae! Ye maun jist lat me step again, mother, intill my ain auld place! Gien onybody comes in, it winna tak’ me a minute to mak’ mysel’ tidy as becomes the minister’s wife. Only that’s to be a’ ower noo, he says, and there’ll be no need.”

SALTED WITH FIRE

With that she broke into a little song, and went on with her work.

At breakfast James made request to his father that he might be allowed to make of a certain little-used loft a room for Isy and himself, so as not to overpeople the house. He had always been fond of carpentering before he took himself to theology, and would now be glad to turn it to use! His father making no objection, he began at once. But his project was interrupted by the arrival of an exceptionally plentiful harvest.

The very day the cutting began, James appeared among the ripe oats with the other scythe-men, and did his best to keep up with them. When his father came, however, he interfered, and compelled him to take it easier, as unfit by habit and recent illness to emulate the others. What delighted his father even more than his good-will was the way he talked with the men and women in the field. Every show of superiority had vanished from his bearing and speech, and he was simply himself, behaving like the others, only with greater courtesy; ready to share with them whatever he had learned that he thought might interest them, and thus letting his light shine, and showing he thought them as fit as himself to receive it.

When the hour for the noonday meal arrived,

SALTED WITH FIRE

Isy appeared with her mother-in-law and old Eppie, bringing the "minister," as they still would call him, his share of the meal in one hand and leading little Peter with the other, to play with him while the labourers rested. For a while the whole field was enlivened with their merriment, after which the child was laid to rest with his bottle under the shadow of an over-arching stook, and went to sleep, with his mother watching the shadow while she took her first lesson in gathering and binding sheaves. When he woke, the grandfather sent his whole family, James and his mother included, to the house for the rest of the day.

"Hoots, Isy, my dautie," he said, when she wanted to continue her work, "would ye mak' a slave-driver o' me, and bring disgrace upo' the name o' father?"

Then at once she obeyed, and went with her husband, — both tired indeed, but happier than ever in their lives before.

SALTED WITH FIRE

CHAPTER XXVI

THE next morning James was in the field with the rest long before the sun was up. Day by day he grew stronger in mind and in body, until at length he was not only quite equal to the harvest-work, but capable of anything required of a farm servant.

His deliverance from the slavery of Sunday prayers and sermons, and his consequent sense of freedom and its delight, greatly favoured his growth in health and strength. Before the winter came, however, he had begun to find his heart turning towards the pulpit with a desire after utterance. For, almost as soon as his day's work ceased to exhaust him, he had begun to take up the study of the recorded sayings and doings of the Lord of men, eager to verify the relation in which he stood toward him, and through him toward that eternal atmosphere in which he lived and moved and had his being, namely, God himself. One day with a sudden questioning hunger he rose in haste from his knees to turn almost trembling to his Greek Testament, in order to find out whether

SALTED WITH FIRE

the words of the Master, "If any man will do the will of the Father," meant "If any man *is willing* to do the will of the Father;" and finding that indeed they did, he was thenceforward so far at rest as to be able to go on asking and hoping; nor was it long then before he began to feel that he had something worth telling, and which he must tell to every man. Heartily he took himself to prayer for that spirit of truth which the same Lord had promised to him that asked for it.

He talked with his wife about what he had found; he talked with his father about it; he went to the soutar and talked with him about it.

Now the soutar had for many years made one use of his Sundays by which he saw he could now be of service to James: he went four miles into the country on the other side of Stonecross, and there held a Sunday-school, at the last farm for a long way in that direction, beyond which lay an unproductive region, consisting mostly of peat-mosses, and lone barren hills, — where the waters above the firmament were but imperfectly divided from the waters below the firmament. The roots of the hills coming together pretty close, the waters gathered and made marshy places, with only here and there patches of higher ground upon which

SALTED WITH FIRE

crops could be raised. Yet there were many more houses in it, such as they were, than could have been expected from the appearance of the country. In one spot, indeed, not far from the farm I have mentioned, there was a small, thin hamlet. A long way from church or parish-school, and without any to minister to the spiritual wants of the people nearer than a good many miles, it was a rather rough and ignorant place, with a good many superstitions, — none of them in their nature specially mischievous, save indeed as they blotted the idea of the divine care and government. It was just the country for bogie-baes and brownie-baes, boodies and water-kelpies to linger and disport themselves long after they had elsewhere disappeared.

When, therefore, James Blatherwick came to him in his need of counsel, the soutar proposed, without giving any special reason for it at the time, that he should go with him next Sunday afternoon to his school at Bogiescratt. James consented with pleasure, and the soutar proposed to call for him at Stonecross on his way.

“Mr. MacLear,” said James, as they walked along the rough parish road together, “it seems to me that I have but just arrived at the point I ought to have reached before ever even desiring to address my fellows upon any matter of religion. Perhaps I knew some little things *about*

SALTED WITH FIRE

religion, but certainly I knew nothing *of* religion; least of all, had I made any discovery for myself in religion — before which no man can understand or know anything whatever about it. I fear lest even now I may be presuming, but I do seem now to know a little of the relation between a man and the God who made him; and with the sense of that, as I was saying to you last Friday night, there has arisen in my mind the desire to communicate to my fellow-men something of what I have learned. One thing I hope at least, that should I be entangled afresh in any desire to show-off, I shall see the danger, and have the grace to pull up. You will tell me I must not be too sure; I will try not to be, but to doubt myself, and so keep on my guard. One thing I have resolved upon — that, if ever I preach again, I will never again write a sermon. I know I shall make many mistakes, and do the thing very badly; but failure itself will help to keep me from conceit — indeed, I hope, from thinking of myself at all, and make me leave myself in God's hands, willing to fail if he pleases. Don't you think, Mr. MacLear, we may look to God now for what we ought to say, as confidently as if, like the early Christians, we stood before the magistrates to explain ourselves?"

"Indeed I do, Mr. James," answered the

SALTED WITH FIRE

soutar. "Hide yourself in God, and out of that secret place speak — and fear nothing. Never think of speaking down to your congregation. Look them in the eyes, and say what at the moment you think and feel; and do not hesitate to give them the best you have."

When is a man most likely to reach the thought and feeling of others, if not when he speaks the thing that is at the moment rising warm within him, direct from the heart of him in whom we live and move and have our being? Have no anxiety about results. I have often found my utterance freest when I felt so far from well that I *must* leave all to him, and take no thought about *how* I was doing my work. Then I am able to say, "Lord, thou seest my condition; look to my work, I pray thee." When the Lord gives you freedom and joy, use them in love and confidence. Be willing to fail in what you have set before you, and let the Lord work his own success — his acceptable and perfect will. Even when Moses presumptuously strikes the rock in his own name, it does not always refuse its precious store; one may be there perishing of thirst, for whose sake it must yield the water of life.

"Thank you, thank you, sir! I think I understand," replied James. "If ever I speak again, I should like to begin in your school!"

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Ye sall — this vera nicht, gien ye like,” replied the soutar. “I think ye hae something e’en noo upo’ yer min’ ’at ye would like to say to them — but we ’ll see hoo ye feel aboot that when I hae spoken a word to them first!”

“When you have said what you want to say, Mr. MacLear, then give me a look; and if I have anything I want to say, I will answer your sign. Then you can introduce me, saying of me what you will. Only, do not spare me; use me after your judgment.”

The soutar held out his hand to his disciple, and they finished their journey in silence.

When they reached the farmhouse, the small assembly was nearly complete. It was mostly of farm-labourers, but a few worked in a small quarry, where serpentine lay below the peat, and in this serpentine occurred veins of soapstone, occasionally of such a thickness as to be itself the object of the quarrier; it was of service in the making of porcelain, and for other uses small quantities of it were in request.

When the soutar began, James was a little shocked to hear him speak in the country-dialect which was his mother-tongue and that of his ordinary conversation; but soon the sense of its unsuitableness vanished, and he felt that the vernacular gave him additional power of expression, and with it of persuasion.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“My frien’s, I was jist thinkin’, as I cam’ ower the hill,” he began, “hooness we war a’ made wi’ differin’ pooers — some o’ ’s able to do ae thing best, and some anither; and that led me to remark, that it was the same wi’ the warl we live in — some pairts o’ ’t fit for growin’ aits, and some bere, and some wheat, or pitatas; and hoo ilk varyin’ bit had to be put to its ain richt use. We a’ ken what a lot o’ uses the bonny marble can be put till; but it wouldna do weel for biggin’ hooses, specially gien there was mony streaks o’ saipstane intill ’t. Still it’s no ’at the saipstane itsel’s o’ nae use, for ye ken there’s a heap o’ uses it can be put till. For ae thing, the tailor tak’s a bit o’ ’t to mark whaur he’s to sen’ the shears along the claith; and again they mix ’t wi’ the clay, for the finer kin’s o’ crockery. But upon the ither han’ there’s ae thing it’s used for by some, ’at canna be considered a richt use; there’s ae wild tribe at least in America that eat a heap o’ ’t — and that’s a thing I cannot un’erstan’; for it does them no guid at a’, ’cept it be jist to fill in the toom places i’ their stammacks, puir reid cratur, and haud their ribs ohn stucken thegither — and maybe that’s what they dee ’t for! Eh, but they maun be sair hungert afore they tak’ till ’t! But they’re only savage fowk, I’m thinkin’, that hae hardly begun to be men ava’!

SALTED WITH FIRE

“Noo ye see what I’m drivin’ at? It’s this — that things should aye be put to their richt uses! But there are guid uses and better uses, and things canna *aye* be putten to their best uses; only, whaur they can, it’s a shame to put them to ony ither than their best. Noo, what’s the best use o’ a man? What’s a man made for? The carritchis (*catechism*) says, *to glorify God*. And hoo is he to do that? Jist by doin’ the wull o’ him that sent him. For the ae perfec’ man said he was born intill the warl for that ae special purpose, to do the wull o’ him that sent him. A man’s for a heap o’ uses, but that ae use covers them a’. Whan he’s doin’ the wull o’ God he’s doin’ just a’thing. Still there are varhious w’ys in which a man can be doin’ the wull o’ his Father in heaven, and the great thing for ilk ane is to fin’ oot the best w’y *he* can do that wull.

“Noo here’s a man sitting aside me that I want to help set to the best use he’s fit for — and that is to tell ither fowk what he kens aboot the God that made him and them, and to stir them up to do what he would hae them do. The fac’ is, that the man was ance a minister o’ the Kirk o’ Scotlan’. But when he was a yoong man he fell intill a great faut — a yoong man’s faut — I’m no gaein’ to excuse ’t — dinna think it! Only I charge ye, be ceevil till him i’ yer

SALTED WITH FIRE

vera thoughts, rememberin' hoo many things ye hae dune yersel's that ye hae to be ashamit o', though it may be they hae never come to the licht; for, be sure o' this, he's repentit richt sair. Like the prodigal, he grew that ashamit o' what he had dune, that he gied up his kirk, and gaed hame to the day's darg upo' his father's ferm. And that's what he's at the noo, thof he be a scholar, and that a ripe ane. And by his repentance he's learnt a heap that he didna ken afore, and that he couldna hae learnt ony ither w'y than by turnin' wi' shame frae the path o' the transgressor. I hae brought him wi' me this day, sirs, to tell ye something — he hasna said to me what — that the Lord in his mercy has tellt him. I'll say nae mair — Mr. Blatherwick, wull ye please tell's what the Lord has putten it intill yer min' to say."

The soutar sat down; and James got up, white and trembling. For a moment or two he was unable to speak, but overcoming his emotion, fell at once, forgetful of his petty repugnance to the vernacular, into the old Scots tongue, and said, —

"My frien's, I hae little richt to stan' up afore ye and say onything; for as some o' ye ken, if no afore, at least noo frae what my frien' the soutar has just been tellin' ye, I was a minister o' the kirk, but ance in my life had behaved sae

SALTED WITH FIRE

ill, that, whan I cam' to mysel', I thought it my duty to gie up my office therein, that anither might tak' my bishoprick, as was said o' Judas the traitor. But noo I seem to hae gotten mair licht, and to ken some things I didna ken afore; sae, turnin' my back upo' my past sin, and believin' God has forgi'en me, and is willin' I should set my han' to his pleuch ance mair, I hae thought to begin here again in a quiet heumble fashion, tellin' ye something o' what I hae begun, i' the mercy o' God, to un'erstan' a wee for mysel'. Sae noo, gien ye'll turn, them o' ye that has broucht yer buiks wi' ye, to the seventh chapter o' John's gospel, and the seventeenth verse, ye'll read wi' me what the Lord says there to the fowk o' Jerusalem: *Gien ony man be willin' to do His will, he'll ken whether what I tell him comes frae God, or whether I say it only oot o' my ain heid.* Luik at it for yersel's, for that's what it says i' the Greek, which is plainer than the English to them that un'erstan' the auld Greek tongue: 'Gien onybody *be willin'* to dee the wull o' God, he'll ken whether what I say comes frae God, or I say 't o' mysel'."

From that he went on to say that, if they kept trusting in God, and doing what Jesus told them, any mistake they made would only help them to understand better what he would have them do.

SALTED WITH FIRE

The Lord gave them no promise, he said, of knowing what this man or that man ought to do; but only of knowing what the man himself ought to do. And he illustrated this by the rebuke the Lord gave Peter when, leaving enquiry into the will of God that he might do it, he made enquiry into the decree of God concerning his friend, that he might know it; seeking wherewithal, not to prophesy, but to foretell. Then he showed them the difference between the Greek and the modern English meaning of the word *prophesy*.

The congregation seemed to hang upon his words, and when they were going away they thanked him heartily for thus talking to them.

That night, as James and the soutar went home together, they were overtaken by an early snowstorm, lost their way, and were in danger, no small one, of having to pass the night on the moor. But the farmer's wife, in whose house they had assembled, had, as they were taking their leave, made the soutar a present of some onions to plant, of a sort for which her garden was famous: exhausted in conflict with the freezing blast, they had lain down, apparently to perish before the morning, when the soutar bethought himself of the onions; and, obeying their nearest necessity, they ate instead of keeping them to plant; with the result that they

SALTED WITH FIRE

were so refreshed, and so heartened to battle with the wind and snow, that at last they got home in the small hours of the morning, weary and nigh frozen.

All through that winter, James accompanied the souter to his Sunday-school, sometimes on his father's old gig-horse, and oftener on foot. Occasionally his father would go also, and then the men at Stonecross began to go, with the cottar and his wife; and the little company gradually increased to about thirty men and women, and half as many children. In general the souter gave a short address, but he always made "the minister" speak; and thus James Blatherwick, while encountering many hidden experiences, went through his apprenticeship to extempore preaching, and, hardly knowing how, grew capable at length of following in his own mind a train of thought, all the better that, as it rose, it found utterance, and was helped out by the sight of the eager faces of his humble friends fixed upon him, while he spoke, as they eagerly drank in, sometimes even anticipated, the things he was saying. He seemed to himself almost at times to see the thoughts taking reality and form in their listening minds, and accompanying him whither he led them: the stream of his thought, as it disappeared from his consciousness and memory, settled in the minds of those who heard

SALTED WITH FIRE

him, like seed cast on open soil. Some of the seed grew up resolutions, and brought forth fruit. And all the road, as the two friends returned, sometimes in moonlight, sometimes in darkness and rain, sometimes in wind and snow, they had such things to think of and talk about, that the way never seemed long. Thus dwindled by degrees Blatherwick's self-reflection and self-seeking, and, growing divinely conscious, he grew at the same time divinely forgetful.

Once, on such an occasion, as his wife was helping him off with his wet boots, he said to her, —

“To think, Isy, that here am I, a dull, selfish creature, always wanting for myself knowledge or influence, grown able to feel in my heart all the way home, that I took every step, one after the other, only by the strength o' God in me, carin' for me as my father! Ken ye what I'm tryin' to say, Isy, my dear?”

“I canna be a'thegither certain that I do, but I'll keep thinkin' about it, and maybe I'll come till 't,” answered his wife.

“I can desire no more,” answered James, “for until the Lord lat ye see a thing, hoo can you or I or onybody see for oorsel's the thing that he maun see first. And what is there for us to desire, but to see things as God sees them, and would hae us see them? I used to think the

SALTED WITH FIRE

soutar a pair fule body whan he was sayin' the vera things I 'm tryin' to say noo. I saw nac mair what he was efter than that pair collie there at my feet — maybe no half sae muckle, for wha can tell what he mayna be thinkin', wi' that far-awa' luik o' his!"

"Div ye think, James, we'll ever be able to see inside them doggies, and ken what they're thinkin'?"

"I wouldna won'er at anything we may come to see, for Paul says, 'A' things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' Wha can tell but the vera herts o' the doggies may lie bare and open till oor hearts, as to the hert o' Him wi' whom they and we hae to do. Eh, but the thoughts o' a doggie maun be a won'erfu' sicht! And syne to think o' the thoughts o' Christ about that doggie! We'll ken them, I daurna weel doobt, some day! I'm surer about that nor about the thoughts o' the doggie himsel'!"

Another Sunday night, having come home through a terrible storm of thunder and lightning, he said to Isy, —

"I hae been feelin', a' the w'y hame, as gien, afore lang, I micht hae to gie a wider testimony. The apostles and the first Christians, ye see, had to beir testimony to the fac' that the man that was hangt up and dee'd upo' the cross, the same was up again oot o' the grave and gangin'

SALTED WITH FIRE

about the warl; noo I canna beir testimony to that, for I wasna at that time waukit up i' the min' o' my Maker; but I micht weel be called upon to beir testimony to the fac' that whaur ance he lay deid and beeried, there he was come alive at last — that is, i' the sepulchre o' my hert. For I hae seen him noo, and ken him noo — the houp o' glory in my hert and my life. Whatever he said ance, I believe for ever."

The talks James Blatherwick and the soutar had together were now, according to Mr. Robertson, even wonderful. But it was chiefly the soutar that spoke, while James sat and listened in silence. On one occasion, however, James spoke out freely, and indeed eloquently. The soutar, accompanying Mr. Robertson to his inn that night, the latter said to him ere they separated, —

"Do you see any reason, Mr. MacLear, why this man should not resume his pastoral office?"

"One thing, at least, I am sure of," answered the soutar, "that he is far fitter for it than ever he was before."

This, Mr. Robertson repeated to James the next day, adding, —

"And I am certain everyone who knows you will vote the restoration of your licence."

"I must speak to Isy about it," answered James with simplicity.

SALTED WITH FIRE

“That is quite right, of course,” rejoined Mr. Robertson; “you know I tell my wife everything, and am a great insister that all men should; but I do not suppose you doubt what she will say.”

“Will not some public recognition of my reinstatement be necessary?” asked James.

“I will have a talk with some of the leaders in the synod, and let you know what they say,” answered Mr. Robertson.

“Of course I am ready,” returned Blatherwick, “to make any public confession judged necessary or desirable; but that will involve my wife. I know perfectly what she will be ready for, but not the less is it my part to lay the thing before her.”

“Of one thing I think you may be sure: that, with our present moderator, your case will be handled with more than delicacy—with tenderness.”

“I must not doubt it; but for my part I would deprecate indulgence. Still, I must have a talk with my wife about it! She is sure to know best.”

“My advice is to leave it all in the hands of the moderator. We have no right to choose our own penalties!”

James went home and opened the whole question to his wife.

SALTED WITH FIRE

Instead of looking frightened, or even anxious, Isy laid little Peter in his cradle, threw her arms round James's neck, and cried, —

“Thank God, my husband, that you have come to this! Don't think to leave me out, I beg of you. I am more than ready to accept my shame. I have always said I was more to blame than you! It was me that should have known better!”

“You trusted me, and I was unworthy of your confidence. But they shall know what you say. Had ever man a wife to be so proud of as I of you?”

Mr. Robertson brought the matter before the synod; but neither James nor Isy heard anything more of it, except what was conveyed in the cordial announcement of the renewal of James's licence, which was soon followed by the offer of a church in the poorest and most populous parish north of the Tweed.

“See the loving power at the heart of things, Isy,” said James to his wife; “out of evil He has brought good, the best good, and nothing but good; a good ripened through my sin and selfishness and greed — for what else is ambition but greed? — bringing upon you as well as me disgrace and suffering. The evil in me had to come out and show itself before it could be cleared away. Some people, nothing but an

SALTED WITH FIRE

earthquake in their little world will wake from their dead sleep. I was one of such. God in his mercy brought on the earthquake, and it woke me and saved me from death. Ignorant creatures who do not yet understand anything go about asking why God permits evil. *We* know why! It may be he could with a word cause evil to cease—but would that be to create good? It might make us good like oxen or harmless sheep, but would that be a goodness worthy of him who was made in the image of God? If a man ceased to be *capable* of evil, he must cease to be a man. What would the goodness be that could not help being good—that had no choice in the matter, but must be such because it was so made? God chooses to be good, else he would not be God: man must choose to be good, else he cannot be the son of God. Herein we see the grand love of the Father of men—that he gives them a part, and that a part necessary as his own, in the making of themselves. Thus, and thus only, by willing the good, can they become partakers of the divine nature.” Satan said, “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” God says, “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil, and choosing the good.” For the sake of this, all the discipline of the world exists. God is teaching us to know good and evil in some real

SALTED WITH FIRE

degree *as they are* and not as *they seem to the incomplete*, that we may learn to choose the good and refuse the evil. He would make them see the two things, good and evil, in some measure as they were, and then say whether they would be good children or not. If they fail, and choose the evil, he takes yet harder measures. If at last it should prove possible for a created being to see good and evil as they are, and choose the evil, then, and only then, there would, I presume, be nothing left for God but to set his foot upon him and crush him, as we crush a noxious insect. But God is deeper in us than our own life, yea, is the very centre and cause of our life; therefore is the Life in us stronger than the Death, for the creating Good is stronger than the created Evil.

THE END.



RETURN TO → CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT
202 Main Library

| | | |
|-----------------|---|---|
| LOAN PERIOD 1 | 2 | 3 |
| HOME USE | | |
| 4 | 5 | 6 |

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

1-month loans may be renewed by calling 642-3405

1-year loans may be recharged by bringing the books to the Circulation Desk

Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

| | | |
|----------------------|--|--|
| NOV 12 1984 | | |
| DEC 12 1984 | | |
| REC CIRC FEB 25 1985 | | |
| NOV 06 1988 | | |
| REC 6 | | |
| AUTO. DISC. | | |
| DEC 05 1988 | | |
| CIRCULATION | | |
| MAR 11 2000 | | |
| | | |
| | | |

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

FORM NO. DD6, 60m, 1/83

BERKELEY, CA 94720

U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C006838686

984396

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

